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OFFICIAL U.S.

PlayStation

MAGAZINE

1UP.COM

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine Issue 102 (March 2006)

EXCLUSIVE

BLACK

THE LAST GREAT PS2 GAME?

+ HANDS ON!

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND—PS2 & PSP

-

PS3 GAMES & INFO

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ATV Offroad Fury 3
PlayStation 2
GREATEST HITS
JAK 3
NAUGHTY DOG
PlayStation 2
GREATEST HITS
SLY 2
BAND OF THIEVES
PlayStation
GREA
THE

7

PRODUCTS RANGE FROM EVERYONE TO MATURE
E-M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

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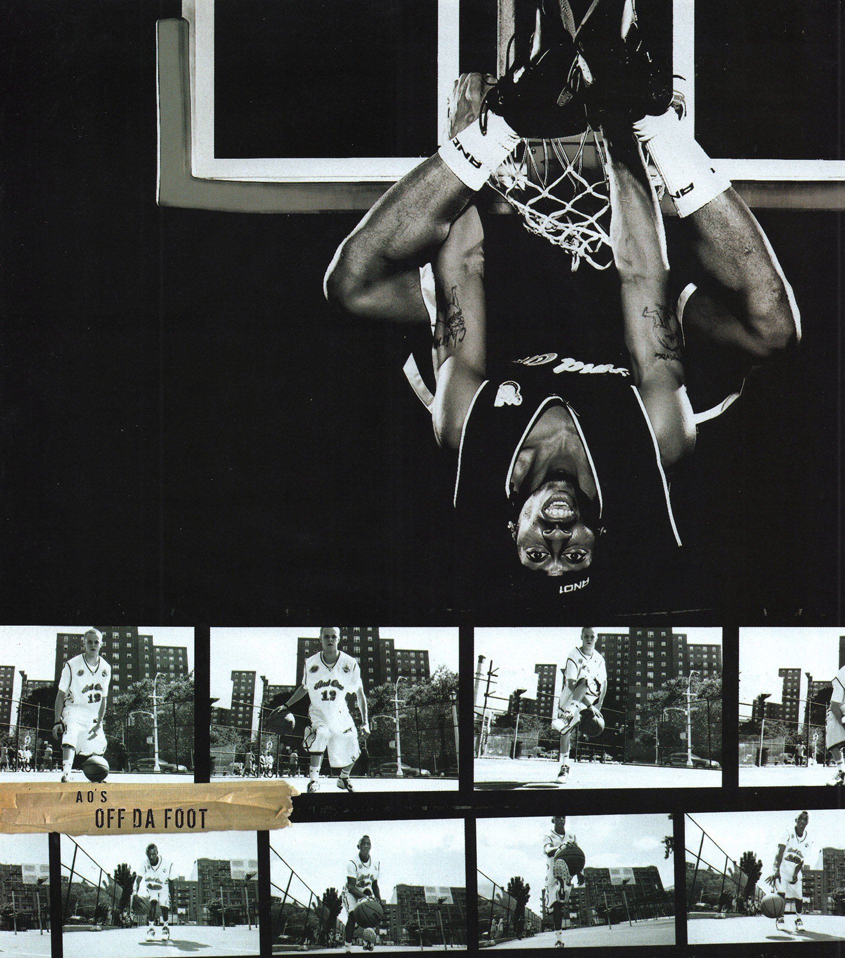

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XBOX LIVE

IT'S ALL **ABOUT THE MOVES.**

WHAT YOU GONNA **CALL YOURS?**

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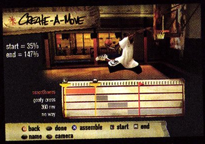
STREETBALL

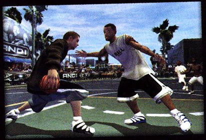
AVAILABLE MARCH 2006

THE PROFESSOR'S

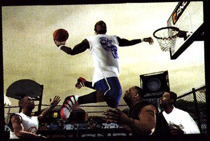
MIDTERM


CREATE-A-MOVE
start = 35%
end = 147%
smoothness
goofy cross
360 rev
no way
back
done
assemble
start
end
name
camera

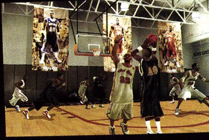
Create your own player and original moves with the revolutionary Create-a-Move editor.



School the competition online and off with the intuitive new I-Ball Control system.



Earn yourself an AND 1 contract by bringing the moves that bring crowds to their feet in Story mode.



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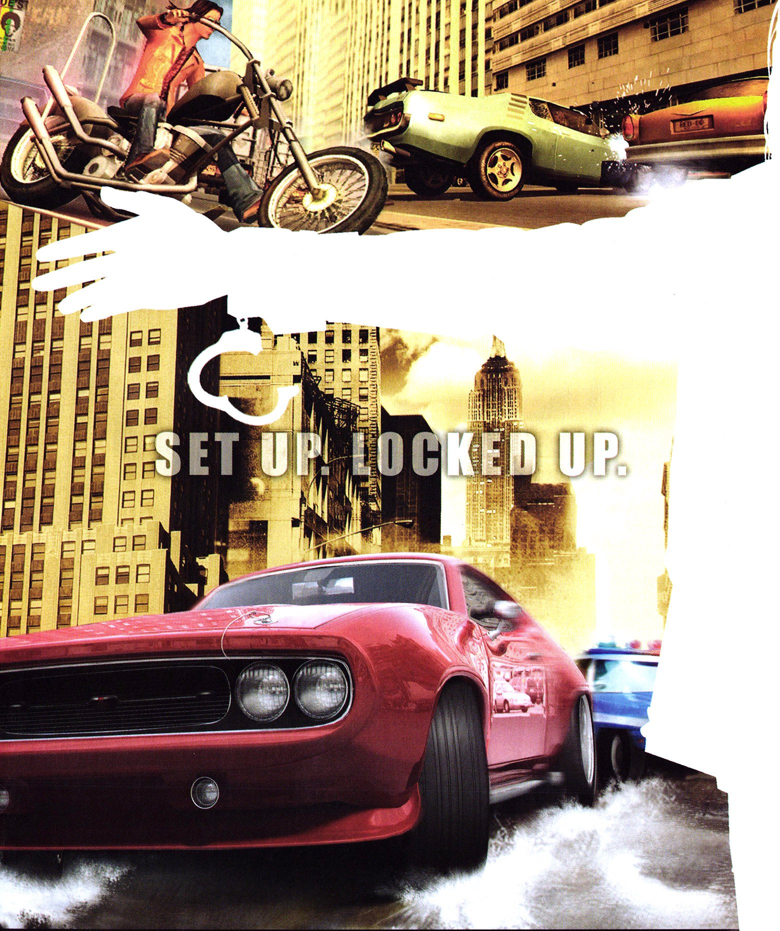
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PlayStation 2
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RP
ATARI

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PlayStation 2

XBOX

ATARI

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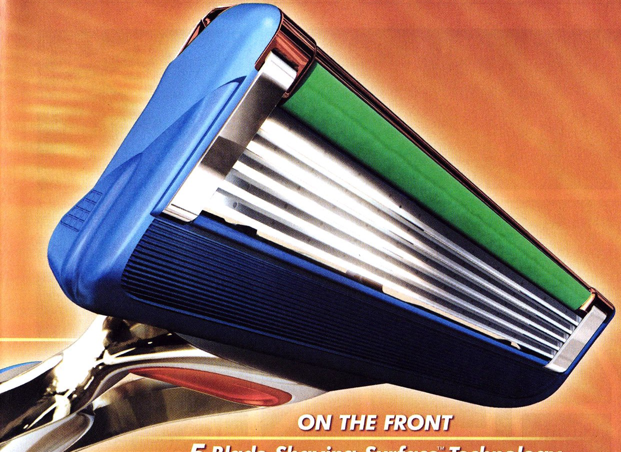

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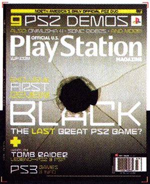
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BLACK

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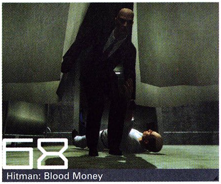

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The games of the year—according to you. Plus, the *OPM* staff picks their faves.

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You don't have to wait for the PS3 to get high-definition gaming.

110 FORGOTTEN GEM: JUMPING FLASH!
Oh, to be a robotic rabbit, aka Robbit...

111 PS1-DERLAND
Sony + first handheld system ≠ success.

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P.S.

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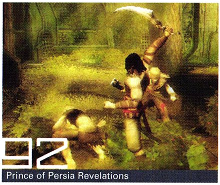

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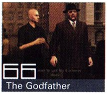

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OPM.1UP.COM

What did we do before the Internet? To be very honest, we have absolutely no idea whatsoever—we can't imagine our days without being able to watch videos of Hurra Torpedo singing "Total Eclipse of the Heart" whenever we want. And it's also awesome for the wealth of gaming screens and videos you can find.

We've always known that *Black* Creative Director Alex Ward is a crazy man. But now we have proof we can share with the rest of the world. We captured our day at the shooting range on tape, and you can watch it for yourself on "The 1UP Show."

For those of you who aren't happy about the Best of 2005 winners, well, don't blame us, because we didn't pick them. Instead, go to bestof2005.1UP.com and sound off on all of your Internet friends for their poor taste.

And if you've read any of our reviews but want a second opinion, you can always drop on by to see what our *EGM* and 1UP cohorts thought.

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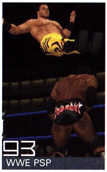

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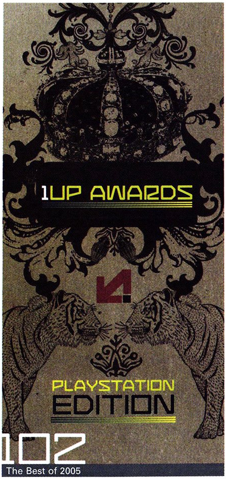

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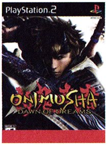
The Best of 2005

ON THE DVD

A DISC FULL OF SUNSHINE...

WELCOME TO OUR WORLD
Wasting money sucks, which is why it's always nice to sample the merchandise before you fork out any cash. And that's where we come in. If you want to take PS2 games for a test drive, there's only one magazine that can help you out—and that's the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*, which you're holding right here in your hands. This month, we're excited to let you taste a sampler of RPG goodness with games like *Shadow Hearts* and *Drakengard 2*. Then give the next in the excellent *Onimusha* series a whirl before trying your hand at the racetrack with *TOCA Race Driver 3*. And that's just the beginning....

PLAY IT!


PlayStation 2
ONIMUSHA
DAWN OF DREAMS

ONIMUSHA: DAWN OF DREAMS
Sample the story mode or try the new "test of valor"—either way, you'll have all the action-packed gameplay you could want.

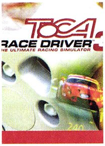
PlayStation 2
SHADOW HEARTS
FROM THE NEW WORLD

SHADOW HEARTS: FROM THE NEW WORLD
Try this tongue-in-cheek RPG, complete with all the off-the-wall quirkiness you've come to expect.

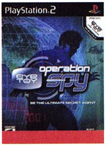
PlayStation 2
SONIC RIDERS

SONIC RIDERS
Every gaming mascot needs a racing game, right? So strap on a hoverboard and join the *Sonic* crew as you race to win that infamous chaos emerald!

DRAKENGARD 2
Let's face it: Dragons rule, and riding one while shooting away at enemies never gets old. You think we're kidding? Load up this demo and see.

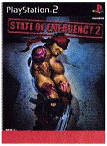

TOCA
RACE DRIVER 3
THE ULTIMATE RACING SIMULATOR

TOCA RACE DRIVER 3
Racing fans, rejoice. The third installment of *TOCA* is here, and you can sample it right now on this lovely disc!

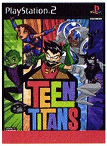

PlayStation 2
EYE TOY
operation spy
BE THE ULTIMATE SECRET AGENT

EYETOY: OPERATION SPY
In this demo, you're a special agent decrypting secret information by maneuvering a holographic cube. Yay for the EyeToy!

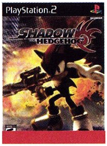
PLAY IT!


PlayStation 2
STATE OF EMERGENCY 2

STATE OF EMERGENCY 2
Spanky MacNeil is back, and he's waging a war against the Corporation and its oppressive dictatorship.

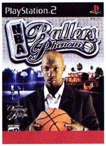

PlayStation 2
TEEN TITANS

TEEN TITANS
Switch between any of these teen heroes and capitalize on the Titans' unique moves and abilities to wipe out the bad guys in this dynamic demo.

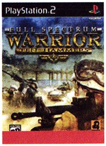

PlayStation 2
SHADOW THE HEDGEHOG

SHADOW THE HEDGEHOG
Set your guns to rapid fire as you take control of Shadow and search for chaos emeralds and learn the secrets of his past.

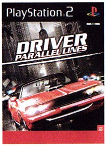
WATCH IT!


PlayStation 2
NBA
Ballers
Phenom

NBA BALLERS: PHENOM
Wanna show your skills? Wanna get noticed? Check out this trailer and see if you have what it takes to be a phenom.


PlayStation 2
FULL SPECTRUM
WARRIOR
TEN HAMMERS

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIORS: TEN HAMMERS
See how the pros coordinate the actions of multiple infantry squads, leading them to victory.


PlayStation 2
DRIVER
PARALLEL LINES

DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES
Will this game make up for *DRIV3R*? Maybe that '70s vibe will help.... Decide for yourself by watching this video.

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
BLACK
Issue 103
SONY

#103

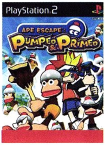
COMING NEXT MONTH

PLAY IT!

- BLACK
- OKAMI
- GENJI: DAWN OF THE SAMURAI
- COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE
- DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES
- BEATMANIA
- ACE COMBAT ZERO: THE BELKAN WAR

WATCH IT!

- ROGUE TROOPER
- TALES OF LEGENDIA
- SHADOW HEARTS: FROM THE NEW WORLD
- APE ESCAPE ACADEMY
- OKAMI
- ONIMUSHA: DAWN OF DREAMS
- RISE OF THE KASAI (REPLAY)
- COLOSSEUM: ROAD TO FREEDOM (REPLAY)
- DEAD TO RIGHTS II (REPLAY)



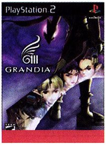
APE ESCAPE 3

The next installment in the *Ape Escape* series is here, replete with pop culture parodies, unique transformations, and crazy minigames.

PlayStation 2
SONIC RIDERS

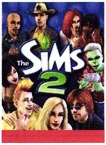
SONIC RIDERS

Watch as the Sonic gang members race against each other on supercool *Back to the Future*–type hoverboards. Ah, if only they were real....



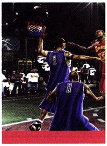
GRANDIA III

The *Grandia* saga, with its grand sweeping plot, continues. Fans should find plenty to like about in this latest installment; check it out and see.



THE SIMS 2

Take your digital avatars with you in this PSP version, or grab a friend and use the Wi-Fi connection to trade items and have Sims hang out together.



AND 1 STREETBALL

And 1 Streetball promises to bring the sickest dunks and alley-oops ever into a game. Check out the video to see if it delivers.

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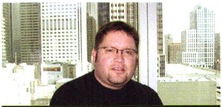
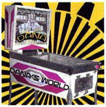


TOM BYRON

made resolutions for 2006, and so far so good. To celebrate his promise to eat less and exercise more, he scarfed down a country-fried steak and egg breakfast at Denny's, noting the walk from his car to the restaurant was "good cardio." His other resolutions include bringing *OPM* readers more Kojima-style interviews (like with *God of War*'s David Jaffe this month) and mounds and mounds—and mounds and mounds—of PS3 goodness. He's also determined to play more PSP games—just the good ones, though, starting with *Exit*.

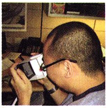


DANA JONGEWAARD

was surprised at how addicted she became to an average pinball game. Now she's looking for a deal on a pinball machine to call her very own. She still has a long ways to go, however, to convince her husband it would be $5,000 well spent.

JOE RYBICKI

spent way too much time playing *Prince of Persia Revelations* this month. He also played too much *Black*. And then the Prince had a little "accident." But we're almost positive that these three facts are unrelated. At least, that's what Joe claims.



THIERRY NGUYEN

feels so bad about playing his DS way more than his PSP that he vowed to make up for lost time in a "special way." How? By making a bizarre hobo-esque set of strap-on goggles so that he'll be forced to look at his PSP 24/7.

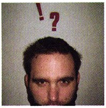
GIANCARLO VARANINI

was disappointed by the lack of PlayStation 3 information at CES, even if the spring launch was an elaborate ruse to fool the assassins. Oh well, he'll just keep busy with the California Crab Tour 2005-2006. Either way, he's crabby.

LOS ANGELES POLICE

LOGAN PARR

beat the speed record for driving from San Francisco to L.A. It didn't go quite as planned, but he did make friends within the LAPD. He should be back once he finishes showing them how to take down the mighty giants in *Shadow of the Colossus*.



RYAN VULK

hates hates HATES to write because he misspells everything. (Thank goodness for editors and spellcheck.) Maybe this is why he ended up choosing to lead a life of visual indulgence of forms and abstractions. His favorite shape is the *MGS* cardboard box.

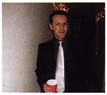
ALEJANDRO CHAVETTA

has been spending way too much time in the company of Scooter and Giancarlo—so much that he's losing touch with reality. In an attempt to gain sanity, he's decided to join the Church of Scientology. Look out, Tom and Katie!

EXTENDED FAMILY

NICH MARAGOS

has suspicions that pizza-by-the-slice sellers are actually in a conspiracy to poison the planet. Yes, Mr. Pizza Man and Escape From New York, he's looking at you.
debaser.1UP.com



GREG FORD

got to indulge his taste for *Arena Football* this month—that is, when he wasn't exercising his edit pen and fixing all of the grammatical errors in the sparkly prose of the *OPM* editors.
egm_ford.1UP.com

ROBERT ASHLEY

comes from Texas, where they grow their game reviewers tall and snarky. He also makes music in not one, but two different bands. He's multifunctional like that.
robertashley.1UP.com

GREG SEWART

hails from the same country cold comes from: Canada. He worked for *OPM*'s sister mag *Electronic Gaming Monthly* for years before joining, and then leaving, the game-design community.
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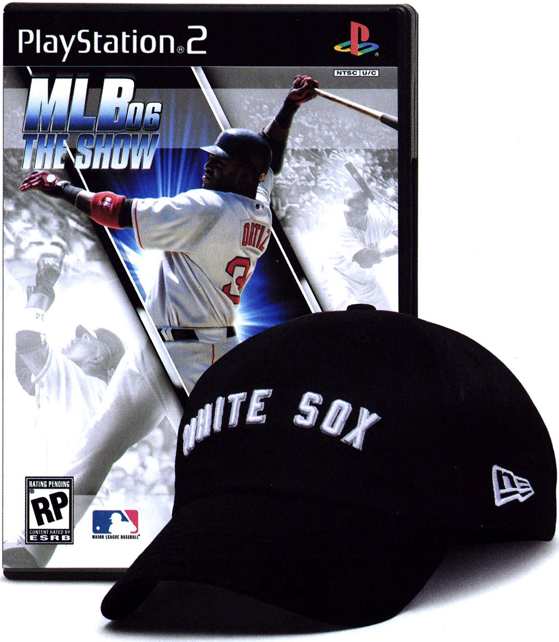

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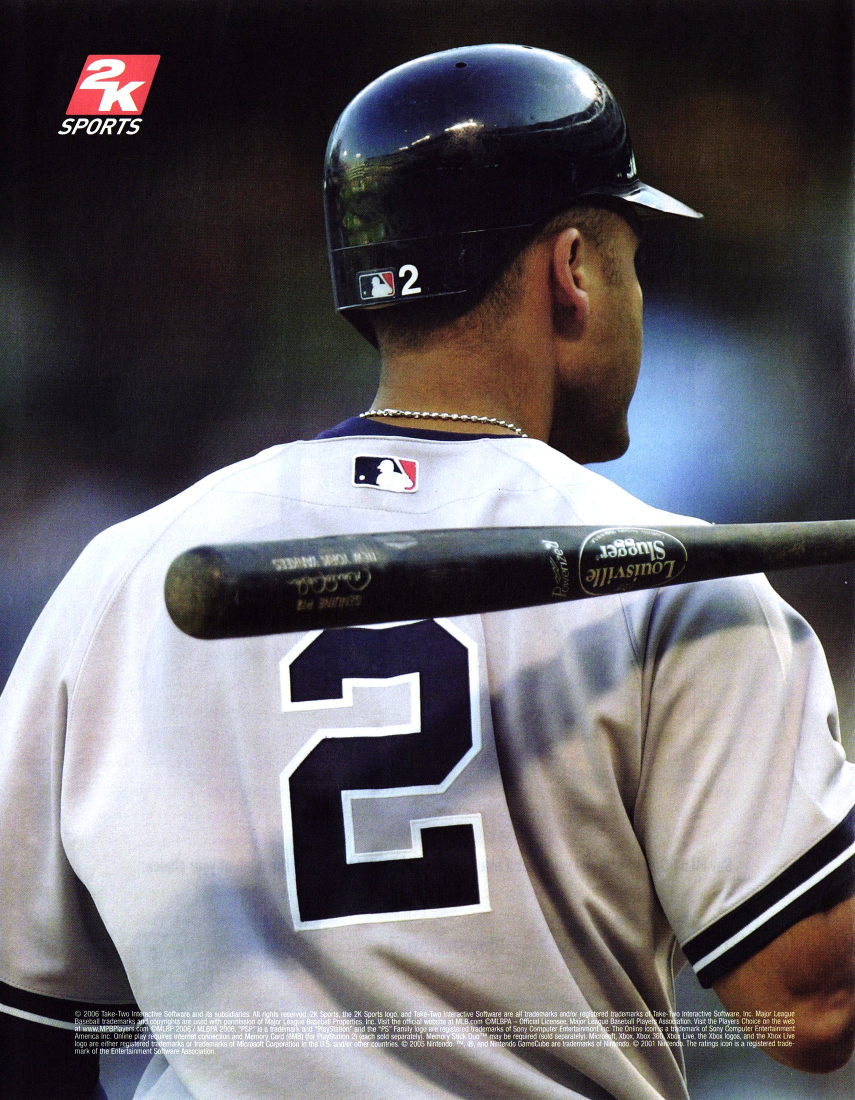

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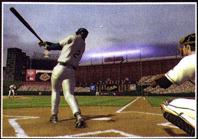

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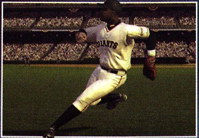

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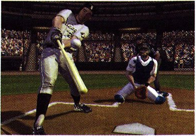

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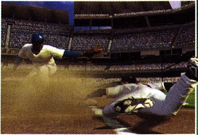

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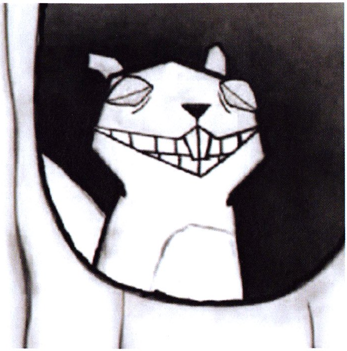

6 PLAYABLE DEMOS!
SOCOM 3
PlayStation
KOJIMA!
"A VIDEOGAME IS NOT ART"
PS3 NEWS!

LETTER OF THE MONTH

NAH, THE SQUIRRELS ARE **MUCH** BETTER

I am an avid fan of the PS2 and all Sony products. However, I am not fond of the PSP. I feel that [the PSP] is nothing short of an attempt to market to people who only care about features rather than games. I am a fan of the Nintendo DS, and I believe that it is more suitable for people who prefer gameplay over features.

I also detest the PSP commercials. Here's an idea for another ad that I think befits the PSP: One piece of fecal matter swims up to another piece of fecal matter in a toilet bowl and says, "Hey man, what are you doing?" The other piece of fecal matter responds, "I'm swimming in bodily waste!" And the other comes back with, "But don't you know you can swim in bodily waste outside?" The other fecal matter, "You're crazy! I thought it was an urban legend." And finally, the announcer with the dull voice says, "PSP: It's like bodily waste you can swim in outside."

I hope that this letter reaches the right people, because quite frankly, I am sick and tired of the PSP and its annoying commercials!

Chris Lackie
Via e-mail

For the record, Chris, OPM heartily disagrees, but we found your letter so over the top, we just had to print it.

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IF IT WAS BOXING DAY, WHY DIDN'T YOU GET FIGHT NIGHT?

As I turned to page 112 to see the start of the "Essential 100" feature [*OPM* #100], a shock of dread passed through my body, as I am sure it did through many others. A top 100 list is a difficult task and just begs for hate mail. But, in this case, this is a letter of enormous gratitude. I based my Boxing Day game shopping on the list, hoping to find a "must-have" game that would blow my mind. As I was looking at *RE4*, I noticed something else beside it—two things, actually—two games that went completely over my head in 2003, two games that I regret not having paid full price for, two games that *need* sequels. *Beyond Good & Evil* and *Freedom Fighters* screamed at me to pay the whopping 20 bucks for them like a puppy at a pet store, so I answered their call. I am glad I did. If the "Essential 100" list were numerical, these two overlooked gems would be mandatory top-10 games. Thank you *so much* for the recommendations, and I am going to begin taking you fine folks more seriously than I already did. Kudos on a fantastic list, and enjoy the hate mail!

Mitchell Dyer
Carstairs, Alberta, Canada

AND IT'S DISHWASHER SAFE

I was playing *Lumines* Wi-Fi against my sister this past Christmas, after kindly giving her a PSP with the game for her present, and a funny thing happened! My mom turned on the microwave in the next room, and the game was suddenly laggy and delayed, reminding me of 16-bit graphics lag back in the day. After the microwave shut off, it was all good!

Scott Whitmore
Via e-mail

STOP THOSE MORGANTOWN MOTHERS!

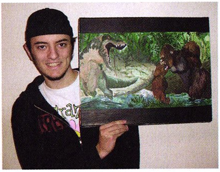
Editors and writers of *OPM*, I must ask you with all sincerity: For the love of God, why did you put the *We Love Katamari* demo on the *OPM* DVD [*OPM* #100]? You have caused me and many others distress with parental units. Mothers all around Morgantown have obsessively played this game ever since my own mother found the demo. Like wildfire, the game spread into households, trapping mothers with its addictive gameplay. To cope with this situation, I have formed a small society labeled VKOM (Victims of Katamari-Obsessed Mothers). Here we cope with lack of time with the household PlayStation in order to keep our generation sane. On behalf of all of our members, I say AGHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!

Jack Butler
Via e-mail

GOING APE FOR ART

I was so excited about the *King Kong* game and movie that I decided to make my favorite ape the subject of my final art project this semester. All the suckers that copied Renoir paintings were mighty jealous, I'm sure.

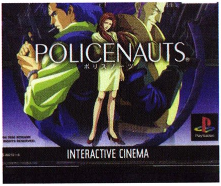
Chima
Via e-mail



WAIT, DIDN'T TIM SCHAFER MAKE THAT ONE?

In "The Best Games You Never Played" [*OPM* #101], I agreed with many of the titles on the list, but you forgot to mention another great import-only PlayStation game: *Policenauts*! Kojima's awesome follow-up to *Snatcher* is an instant classic, containing everything that Kojima puts into his games: an awesome story line, great characters, intrigue, great music, beautiful hand-drawn graphics, etc. True, this game is heavy on Japanese text, and once upon a time it had a scheduled release date here in the United States for the Saturn, but the game is still fully playable and has walkthroughs available on the Internet. In the end, it's a Kojima classic that will be the only one of his gems to never make it Stateside.

Steven Junko
Via e-mail



The article's writer, Jeremy Parish, responds: "Good call, but we were shooting for games that are a bit friendlier to the average American. (Notice the lack of RPGs?) Japanese literacy isn't necessary to blow the crap out of stuff in Gradius Gaiden, *but in* Policenauts *the text is the point."*

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[^] Where available. Number transfer may take up to 10-14 days.

JAPAN ME!

OK, Japan has the best consumer stuff ever, and this month's J-Town [*OPM* #101] just furthers that theory. I have bought many funny/awesome stuffed animals for my girlfriend over the years from Japan, including Gloomy Bear and a "jelly" from *Dragon Warrior*. But a boozin' cat?! Come on! I need one of those myself!

Problem is, even with some of the info from the article on Mona Neko (or Noma Neko, his legal battle counterpart) and on the band O-Zone and its label, Avex, I cannot find a single stuffed cat for sale! I checked the Internet, Japan-based stores like J-Store, and even eBay to no avail. Can you give any advice on where I can locate one of these Mona Neko cats?

Brian Conway
Via e-mail

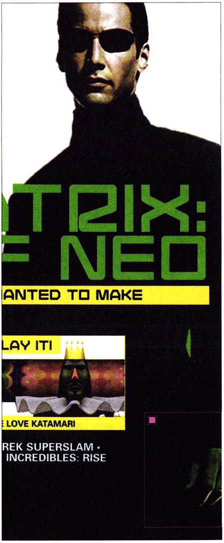
J-Town writer and OPM Japan correspondent Andrew Vestal responds: "This adorably inebriated feline isn't sold in stores; the stuffed toys are only available as prizes in UFO catcher 'crane' machines, so you need to buy from someone who grabbed one himself. That means turning to the eBay of Japan: Yahoo! Auctions (auctions.yahoo.co.jp). A recent search for "nomaneko" in the hiragana alphabet turns up over 100 drunken salarycats, so you should have your pick of the litter. Be warned: Most sellers don't ship overseas, so you'll need to use a pricey proxy service like Celga (www.celga.com) to place your bid. Good luck!"

WHUDDAYAMEAN NO MGS4 ARCADE EDITION?!

This letter is to Mr. Wilson regarding his Outsider column in Issue #100. It's obvious that you feel your words can't inspire any change. I don't believe this. It's true that the chances that a bigwig at Sony will see your article are slim to none. However, you're counting out the most important demographic of all: the bigwigs of tomorrow. I read your article and I agree with all your ideas. This is extremely relevant because in 20 years people like me are going to be making the decisions that matter in games. At the age of 14, I've got virtually the entirety of my serious education ahead of me. In a decade or two I could very well have a hand in the next big game or console. I will tell you one thing; I will never forget the meaning behind your column. You're influencing people like me today and creating a new type of executive, a superexecutive if you will, one who knows firsthand what it's like to have an idea that nobody will listen to. Don't get your hopes up about playing an *MGS4* arcade edition, but if I have anything to say about it, expect to see a PS4 arcade machine in a theater near you. The only thing you're deluded about is your idea that nobody hears what you have to say.

Abebe
Via e-mail

NEITHER DID WE



On the front of your game disc cover [*OPM* #100], I never knew Neo had a green reptile hand with claws.

Isaac Speed
Dallas, IA

WE HAVE A WINNER!

Travis Goss of Savanna, IL, is the lucky winner in *OPM*'s 100 Games giveaway from the 100th issue. Be sure to visit sgtmetal.1UP.com to let Travis know how jealous you are.

READER REVIEWS

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THE WARRIORS

WHAT YOU SAID

"This is the best brawling-style game I've ever played, hands down. I love the fact that the player can be all the Warriors throughout the game. I can never get tired of the fighting. The controls are fairly simple and it's fun to dish out ass-whoopings. The voiceovers are fantastic (especially James Remar voicing Ajax). The graphics are pretty good, and the cinematics copied from the movie are awesome. The gameplay can never get tiring, and my friends and I have fun with the multiplayer. The minigames, like running from the Furies, are fun, too. I think Rockstar did an excellent job of making this movie into a game." | *Luther*

READER SCORE 5 | 5

WHAT WE SAID

"Rockstar obviously went to great lengths to nail the movie's feel, and it pays off. When you hit the actual movie-based scenes near the game's end, you really feel a part of the world—a world that is far deeper and more organic than any other brawler's in years."

OPM SCORE 4.5 | 5

Want to have your say about a recent game? Think you can do better than us? Send your review (don't forget the score!) to opm@ziffdavis.com with the subject "READER REVIEW."

1UP.com

BLOG OF THE MONTH

Josh Williams offers helpful tips on how to get Blog of the Day on 1UP. Maybe his advice can get you Blog of the Month in OPM.

"What makes the 1UP blog of the day?

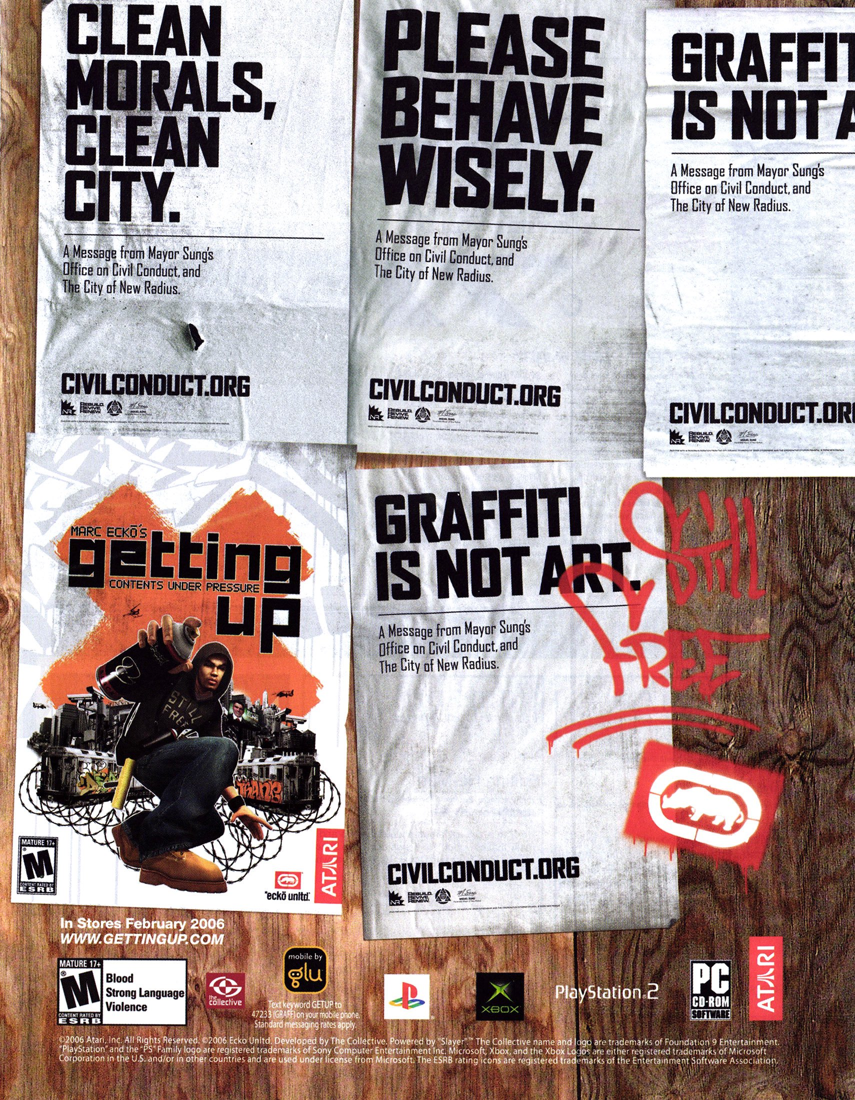
I. Topic: Pretty self-explanatory, but it is still the meat of a blog. Anyone can write about a game that they just played, what they did on the weekend, or a party that they went to, but remember that this is a gaming site, not just a site about games. I would think that the topic would have to include something about gaming, such as finding a bunch of rare, collectible games at a retro gaming convention, ranting about the latest piece of crap, or simply expressing your thoughts on the latest in industry happenings. I would think of it like this: A bare-bones topic won't get you noticed at all, but a topic with feeling will get some people interested."

Check out the rest of Josh's tips at mquest.1UP.com

CLUB OF THE MONTH

UWE BOLL FAN CLUB

With one really bad videogame-based movie after another, Uwe Boll has become this generation's Ed Wood. Think his films are good, or so bad they're good? Have we got a club for you. uwebollfan-club.1UP.com/



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GAMERS ARE TALKING ABOUT

STRAIGHT FROM THE OPM MESSAGE BOARDS (BOARDS.1UP.COM)

100
PLAYSTATION 1, PLAYSTATION 2, AND PSP
GAMES YOU MUST PLAY
BEFORE YOU DIE

THE BEST YEAR EVAR?

The *OPM* message boards have been sprightly of late. A particularly lively discussion was sparked by our "Essential 100" in *OPM* #100 in this post entitled "After reading *OPM*'s 100 Best List..."

GTChampion presses Start: "What in your mind has been the best year for the PlayStation? For me it was 1998: *Gran Turismo, Metal Gear Solid*...man that was awesome. It's also the year I got my PlayStation. I guess I picked a good year. Anyway, what's yours and why?"

Irishmalt already feels pressure, but comes through: "Probably 2004, if I had to choose. *Kill.switch, Psi-Ops,* lots of *SOCOM II* online, and plenty of other titles I can't think of at the moment. I just know I poured a ton of gaming time into my PS2 that year."

With a long list that includes *Front Mission 3, Vagrant Story, Final Fantasy IX*, and *Chrono Cross*, chocomog33 has not a doubt that 2000 was the year. Milo900 gets a tad off-topic with this not-too-subtle threat to the editors: "*Suikoden II*. That took the cake, no questions asked. That game owned me, and I would have burned my *OPM* collection if it wasn't in ['The Essential 100' list]."

FROM ME TO YOU

Dear Everybody,

Have you heard? The PlayStation 3 is coming this year! Are you ready? Seriously, are you?

It's an important question: At *OPM* we aren't quite yet. There's still plenty to look forward to on the PS2 (*FFXII, Godfather, Okami*, and *Tomb Raider: Legend* to name a few), and the PSP is looking good with the likes of *Metal Gear Acid 2, Syphon Filter*, and *Daxter*.

Part of the "problem" is that Sony has given only enough information about the PS3 to get everybody hot and bothered. Beyond the obvious "it'll be better than anything you've ever seen before," what we really know isn't a whole heckuva lot. We all want to know the ship date (sooner than you think!), the cost of the system (expensive at first), the cost of the games ($70 is not unrealistic), and the list of launch titles. And what about online play? What about HDTV needs? What about *GTA4*?!

But what we *do* know and can share with you is that the PS3 will be awesome. C'mon, you know you can't wait. And neither can we. In the coming months, beginning with the April issue, you'll see a big leap in *OPM*'s PS3 coverage. We are, after all, the official mag, and we want to make sure you have the official word.

With E3 barely three months away and the Xbox 360 come and, I'd say, gone, mark 2006 as the year of the PS3.

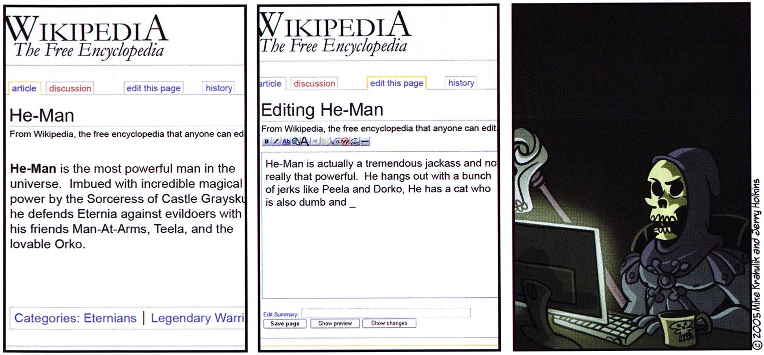
Take care,

Tom Byron, Editor-in-Chief

Are YOU ready for the PS3? What are your big questions? Which games are you looking forward to most? Let Tom know at OPM@ziffdavis.com.

PENNY ARCADE

PENNY-ARCADE.COM



He-Man

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia that anyone can ed

He-Man is the most powerful man in the universe. Imbued with incredible magical power by the Sorceress of Castle Graysku he defends Eternia against evildoers with his friends Man-At-Arms, Teela, and the lovable Orko.

Editing He-Man

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit.

He-Man is actually a tremendous jackass and no really that powerful. He hangs out with a bunch of jerks like Peela and Dorko, He has a cat who is also dumb and _

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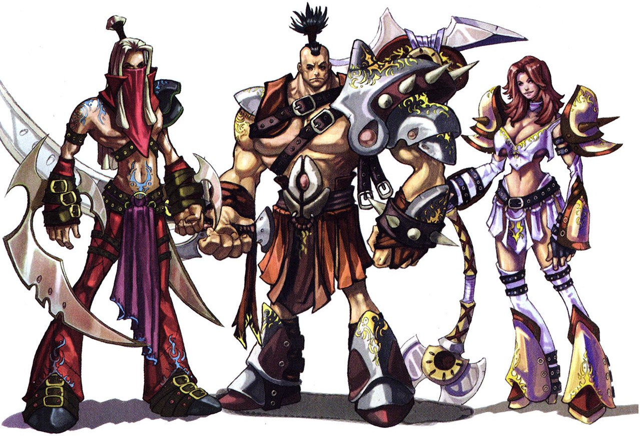

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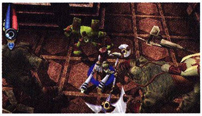
Expect the unexpected on your journey: destructible walls, hero-killing traps, and a series of in-game objects that must be investigated and manipulated.

Untold Legends™ The Warrior's Code™ comes to life with brand-new, enhanced graphics, character animations, environment lighting, and special effects. This time around, voiceovers help tell the story, and new cut-scenes highlight the plot like never before. Combat has been improved, allowing up to six spells to be mapped to the PSP™ system's controller buttons and triggers and enemies now feature a tougher set of artificial intelligence behaviors making them both stronger and smarter.



LIVE THE WARRIOR'S WAY

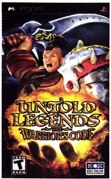
Become a spell-casting wizard. Take the role of a brutish swordsman. Slay your enemies as an assassin with a dual-bladed weapon. Rain death on all who oppose you as a bow-wielding scout. It's your call with *Untold Legends™ The Warrior's Code™* for the PSP™ (PlayStation®Portable) system.

An all-new action role-playing game, *Untold Legends™ The Warrior's Code™* is the sequel to the number one PSP™ system RPG* game, *Untold Legends™ Brotherhood of the Blade™*. You play as a shape-shifting adventurer, gifted with the ability to transform into a ferocious animal for short periods of time. On your quest to save your people from destruction, you'll need to hack and slash your way through hordes of monsters and 12 massive boss enemies before reaching the greatest evil of all...

It's hard to believe an adventure this big could fit on a handheld. A magical realm, one fraught with peril and 40 diabolical creatures, awaits. Choose from one of five character classes, each with its own unique skills and transformation abilities. Wield devastating weapons, cripple foes with all-new Attacks of Opportunity, and hurl killer spells as you explore more than 45 painstakingly hand-crafted, highly-detailed 3D environments.

Go online with *The Warrior's Code's* multiplayer options. Up to four combatants can duke it out in a no-holds-barred player-versus-player competition. A cooperative mode lets you and a friend explore the game's story mode together, working in tandem to solve puzzles and defeat foes. New chat- and matchmaking options make finding and talking with fellow adventurers a snap, and online play blends seamlessly with solo action; any items and skills acquired in multiplayer can be used in solo play and vice-versa.

*According to NPD Group as of October 1, 2005.



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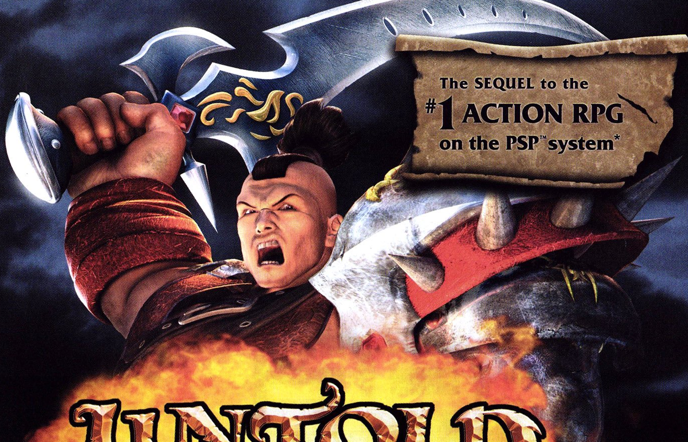
What Dark Beast Lurks Within You?



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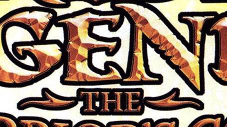
Experience five chapters of stunning new levels rendered in exquisite graphical quality and enhanced detail.

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HYPE

PREVIEWS AND NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PLAYSTATION

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IN THE BEGINNING
WE TRY OUT 10 OF THE HOT GAMES OF SPRING

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Want new info? Yeah, so do we.

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David Jaffe wants to teach a spinning class.

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Never has a Snake in the grass looked so good....

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We haven't seen this many collections since stamp club.

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...wants to be a rock star. Instead, she has a claw.

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Not to be confused with that cat from the Meow Mix commercial.

70 X3
The Iceman cometh...and so do Nightcrawler and Wolverine.

THE CRYSTAL BALL

A LOOK BACK ON WHAT WAS IN THE YEAR 2005 AND WHAT WILL COME TO BE

From just about every angle, 2005 will be a year to remember in the annals of videogame history. Not only did we see two new systems on store shelves and three new system announcements, but we also had some of the best games and many groundbreaking events that will define the videogame industry, for better or for worse, in the years to come.

GTA ROLE REVERSAL
Rockstar has announced that they will be porting *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City* Stories from the PSP to the PS2, marking the first time a publisher has done a port from the handheld to the full-size console. We hope this doesn't start a trend of cannibalizing new titles—otherwise what reason do we have to own a PSP?

WHAT HAPPENED?

Ports aplenty between the PSP and PS2.

WHY IS IT GOOD?

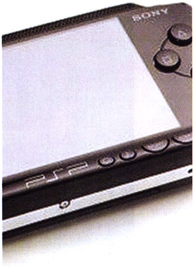
Some games allow you to transfer data between the versions, allowing you to take a home game on the road. Other PSP ports provide a quicker, simpler, more visceral version of their console cousins.

WHY IS IT BAD?

Most ports appear to have been undertaken with little or no recognition of the special requirements of portable gaming. Poor control schemes, long load times, and simple design errors make it seem as though many designers are taking the quick and easy route.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Sony has always made a big deal out of the connectivity between the PSP and the PS2. While this seems like a cool feature, it's given developers an excuse to phone it in when it comes to PSP games. Do you really want to pay around $80 to play what amounts to the same game on two systems? Hopefully, we'll see some more creativity in 2006 with the arrival of *Killzone* on PSP and fewer straight ports. And let's face it: A major reason why you buy new hardware is so you can play games on it that don't really exist anywhere else, which is part of the reason why the Nintendo DS was so successful in 2005 and will probably continue to be successful in 2006. Sony needs to capitalize on the portability of the PSP and encourage developers to try new things and not just rely on console ports.



WHAT HAPPENED?

System launches—two of them to be exact. The PSP and the Xbox 360 both jumped onto the scene.

WHY IS IT GOOD?

New hardware is a great thing. It gives developers a chance to strut their stuff on a technical level, and it usually means that we see a few new gameplay ideas thrown in as well in an attempt to take advantage of the new technology.

WHY IS IT BAD?

In the case of new consoles, 2005 meant higher prices for next-generation games. Xbox 360 games retail for $60, suggesting that PS3 games will be around the same price, if not more. Also, as with any system launch, there's the problem of game supply. The PSP hit a huge drought in the months following its launch, leaving little reason for anyone to pick up a system unless they were really keen on watching movies. The Xbox 360 seems to be facing a similar problem over the past few months, along with supplies of the console not meeting demand.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Basically, Sony can learn from its own mistakes and the mistakes of the others, and it seems like it already has since the hype machine has been kept in check. As Sony CEA's president, Kaz Hirai, told *OPM* in Issue #100, Sony is taking its time, ensuring that the launch is done on the company's own terms and that it's not being dictated by market conditions. Hopefully, we'll see a steady stream of reasonably priced games.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Licenses, licenses, licenses.

WHY IS IT GOOD?

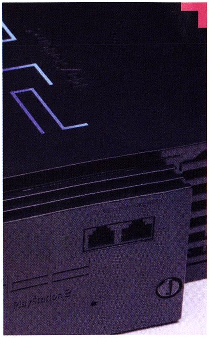
Most things associated with licenses had an interesting time in 2005. Movie licenses in particular had a good year. Ubisoft's *King Kong* turned out to be great, as did Rockstar's *The Warriors*. In sports, the NFL-exclusivity development pushed companies such as Midway to come up with something original, proving you don't need the NFL license to have fun.

WHY IS IT BAD?

Exclusivity is a terrible thing, even if it spurs the creative juices in the minds of other developers. It raises potential issues by being "the only game in town," so gamers have no choice if they want to play something associated with a particular license. Lack of creativity is still a problem with licenses as well since developers have the tendency to rely on the license, as opposed to the content, to sell a game—a scenario that can be applied to Electronic Arts' *From Russia With Love*.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

As big a deal as they were last year, licenses are going to be even bigger in 2006. *The Godfather* and *Scarface* are just two of the movie-based games that have enormous budgets behind them. Also, with Hollywood returns dwindling, look for the studios to push licenses to game developers and publishers even more, which could be really good or just flat-out awful for the industry.



WHAT HAPPENED?

Online gaming got bigger than before.

WHY IS IT GOOD?

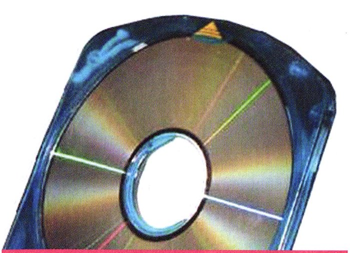
In most people's eyes, online play significantly extends the life of a game, and in many cases, it can be the star of the show.

WHY IS IT BAD?

Xbox Live—it shows what Sony needs to do with online services, yet the company seems so hesitant to embrace that model.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Online gaming is going to be a huge part of the next generation of consoles. The Xbox 360 has already set the tone, and it's up to Sony to match what Microsoft has done by including some excellent online features right out of the box. Unfortunately, Sony's being really quiet about the whole thing, and just about all the clues suggest that the PS3 won't have an Xbox Live–type service, but we'll just have to wait and see. Epic's Mark Rein suggested to *OPM* in Issue #95 that the PlayStation 3 would feature an open network, similar to the one that the PlayStation 2 has right now. Ultimately, that would probably be better for developers since it gives them more control over their own servers, but as Xbox Live has illustrated, the infrastructure model, in which all online features adhere to a single design, seems to be far more successful. Of course, it's always possible that Sony can find a way to make the former model work by using some method we haven't considered yet.



PS3 WATCH

CES: A WHOLE LOT OF NOTHING GOING ON

It's gone eerily quiet on the PlayStation 3 front. Those in the know were betting on Sony announcing a release date or launch lineup—or *something*—at the 2006 Consumer Electronics Show. But CES stormed into Las Vegas in January…and stormed out four days later with barely a word said about PS3. While Sony as a whole had quite a presence at the yearly gadget-fest, the PlayStation brand was only a small part. The *Metal Gear Solid 4* trailer from last year's Tokyo Game Show continued to captivate audiences in Sony's booth, along with familiar snippets of *Tekken*, *Vision Gran Turismo*, and *Formula 1* ostensibly running on PS3 tech. But no new videos were shown, no new games were announced, and barely any new information was divulged.

> SONY CHOSE TO FOCUS ON THE CORE TECH BEHIND THE SYSTEM.

Instead, Sony chose to focus on the core technology behind the system: the Cell processor and the Blu-ray Disc format. Sony announced new Blu-ray Disc (or BD) players and recorders and underscored the role of BD-to-DVD backward compatibility in the PS3. In his keynote speech, Sony Corporation Chairman and CEO Sir Howard Stringer said, "BD is not evolutionary; it is revolutionary, with dramatically greater storage capacity than any other format."

Meanwhile, Sony CEA President and CEO Kaz Hirai talked up the power of the Cell processor. "In order to harness the huge potential," Hirai said at the same keynote, "Sony has established an organization that is specifically tasked with developing Cell-based products other than PlayStation 3."

And as for the PS3 platform itself, Hirai said, "The game-development community worldwide has been hard at work creating new experiences that will really exceed consumer expectations. In fact, we have already distributed more than 4,000 PlayStation 3 development kits to partners around the globe."

We couldn't help but wonder why Sony didn't try to trumpet the PS3 a bit more loudly. "We weren't looking at CES as a vehicle to kick-start our communication for PlayStation 3," said a Sony CEA spokeswoman. "Stay tuned, as we will release additional details in the near future." |

BLU HEAVEN

Haven't been keeping up with your Blu-ray news? Here's a quick rundown of the format's highlights:

- 25GB of storage per layer (a DVD can store 4.7GB per layer)
- Resolutions up to 1920x1080p (twice as high as all but the most high-end televisions currently on the market)
- Nine hours of HD video (a DVD can store roughly two hours)
- 26 hours of standard-definition video
- Backward compatibility

OVERHEARD

Remember *Motor Storm,* that off-road racer whose PS3 trailer dropped almost as many jaws as *Killzone* did at E3 2005? It stars in the most intriguing PS3-related tidbit we stumbled across this month. During our interview with Criterion's Alex Ward for our exclusive *Black* review (page 76), Ward let slip the following nugget: "[This is] something I, er, overheard in a pub somewhere," he cautioned. "I was speaking to some, ah, friends of mine in the industry, and we were talking about those videos we all saw at E3, and the big question on many gamers' lips was, 'Can the games look like that?' And a couple of people I spoke to, who I trust to probably be in the know, said that they thought that *Motor Storm* was coming along really well and would be very close to, if not better than, those videos. And that—as a developer and as a gamer—is something that gets me excited."

PS3 GAMES CONFIRMED

Sony revealed on its Japanese PlayStation site that *The Eye of Judgement, Genji 2, Angel Rings, Monster Carnival, Everybody's Golf 5,* and a *Gran Turismo* game are all confirmed for release on the PS3.

ALEX WARD

ON THE NEXT GENERATION

OPM You have [*Black*] running on PS2 and on Xbox, but you've been demoing it on PS2. Why?

AW That was the one hooked up into the big TV, honestly—though we always lead on PlayStation 2 at Criterion; we're specialists on that system. We probably know more about the system than anybody. This generation, to us, has always been about making big, multimillion-selling PS2 games. But the game is also on Xbox, and the differences are minor. A lot of people get confused and think that this means we're not trying on the Xbox version or we're lazy. No. We try to make the PS2 version look like the best Xbox game you've ever seen. We've always done that; we push hardware hard in our office and we get the best results. A lot of people asked us to take *Black* and launch straight-away on the next-generation systems, and we decided not to do that.

> "WE TRY TO MAKE THE PS2 VERSION LOOK LIKE THE BEST XBOX GAME."

OPM How important is the technological advance of the next generation as compared to the value of experience in developing for this generation?

AW There are a lot of developers out there talking about the next generation, talking about technology. In my mind, a lot of these developers didn't make any good games on PS2, so why should we believe they're going to make anything good on PS3? When Rockstar starts to talk about PlayStation 3, I'll be listening. When Kojima talks more about PS3, I'll be listening. When Kazunori Yamauchi talks, I'm listening. When some of the other guys, who haven't put a game out at all in five years, are talking to me about it, I'm not as interested.

Go back to the PlayStation 2 launch: There were a lot of developers there waxing lyrical about it—but some of them never made any games for PS2. They're the same guys talking the same [things] at every hardware launch, talking about the joys of gaming that technology will bring. To me, as a gamer, I always think, "Shut up and show me your games."

OPM What about the demos shown for PS3 so far?

AW I saw that *Metal Gear* stuff in Japan and was immediately talking to people back in the office who thought, "It's just a video; it's all fake; it's not going to be like that." And then, of course, [Kojima] played it the next day. So I'm excited. For a gamer, this is the best year yet. |

i play. i win. i gloat. i kick back. i catch a movie. i hear some tunes. all thanks to one little card.

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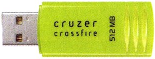

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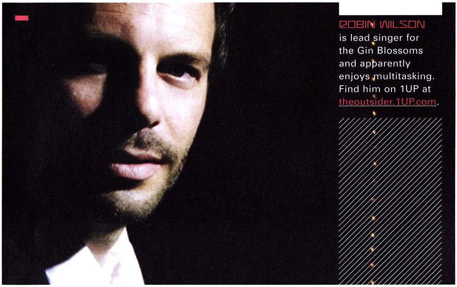


ROBIN WILSON is lead singer for the Gin Blossoms and apparently enjoys multitasking. Find him on 1UP at theoutsider.1UP.com.

THE OUTSIDER

YOUR BRAIN ON FATAL FRAME

Recently our band was in the studio recording a new CD. Our records are mostly guitars, so when I wasn't singing I found myself with a lot of free time. As much as I enjoy telling our guitarists what to do and how to play, I gave everyone a break and spent a good deal of time playing videogames in the studio lounge. I loaded up with all the holiday hits and shared the PlayStation gospel with the studio staff.

At one point during the sessions, we received a visit from our record company president (hi, Al). He spent most of the day watching (and listening to) guitars being recorded, but eventually he got bored enough to come looking for me in what had become my "game lounge." Al is an intelligent nongamer and he peppered me with great questions about the games: How are they made? What types of skills are required? How do they affect the brain? What's the deal with *Grand Theft Auto*? Clearly he was bored and trying to kill some time before his flight.

"So, these games take a lot of skill, huh," he began.

"Well, not this one," I told him. "This is *Fatal Frame*. If you can read a map and push buttons, you can play this. But I suppose it does involve some light problem solving and resource management."

"No s***," says the millionaire CEO, impressed.

"Oh sure," I tell him, just hitting my stride. "Any kid who knows his way around these games could easily manage a squadron of needy samurai or even handle a cash register."

It went on like this for a while, with me showing off the year's best games. I even gave Al a tour of San Andreas and made some attempt to explain the controversy and appeal of *Grand Theft Auto*. But eventually I noticed him eyeing his watch and realized he was probably trying to figure a classy way out of the conversation.

> "VIDEOGAMES ARE FUN BECAUSE OUR BRAINS' PLEASURE CENTERS ARE STIMULATED."

The encounter got me thinking, and I decided to visit the library to read up on videogame research. (Ironically, while at the library, I spent most of my time on the Internet.) I found what I was looking for, and it turns out that science is figuring out what we gamers already knew but couldn't articulate. Apparently, videogames are fun because our brains' pleasure centers are stimulated when we learn stuff we enjoy. What a shock. Videogames are great teachers, and more than a few learning researchers are trying to figure out how to employ them to teach us practical stuff, like math and how to fit into the Army.

Many videogames require multitasking and enhanced visual abilities. When playing, we prioritize objectives and resources, delay gratification, and often exercise nerve-bending patience. But then, anyone who ever played a *Castlevania* game could have told you that.

PLAYSTATION BITS

After being exposed to the flurry of videogame-to-movie crap, we're shocked to see that the ***Silent Hill*** movie looks like it's shaping up to be a faithful portrayal of the game's utter insanity. Plus, it looks like they really managed to nail the fog effect. Check it out at flash.sonypictures.com/movies/silenthill/site/silenthill.mov.... In other movie-related news, it looks as though Rachel Weisz, star of ***The Mummy*** and ***The Mummy Returns***, will be lending her voice talents to the new Lara Croft in Crystal Dynamics' upcoming ***Tomb Raider: Legend***. Great choice, Eidos! Hopefully, this will help give a little prestige back to Ms. Croft.... On the "this industry is eventually going to be owned by one company" front, Take-Two announced its purchase of Irrational Games, the development team behind the excellent comic-book-based ***Freedom Force*** titles, and while Irrational has traditionally been a PC developer, the company seems to be considering console development as well. Perhaps a ***Freedom Force*** for PS3 to combat Activision's ***X-Men Legends*** series? Could be interesting.... Lastly, fans of the original *Lego Star Wars* will be happy to hear that a new *Lego Star Wars* game is coming to the PS2; it will be called ***Lego Star Wars: The Original Trilogy***. We can't wait.

UNIVERSAL MEDIA DISC
UMD
UMD
PSP

WHAT'S IN YOUR PSP?

SHINTA NOJIRI

Shinta Nojiri, director of *Metal Gear Acid 2*

GAMES

I'm actually playing the retail version of *Acid 2*. I'm collecting all the cards without using my debug tricks. So far I've got 255 out of 555 cards.

MOVIES

Let me tell you what I want to see—*The Adventures of Sharkboy and Lavagirl in 3-D* using our Solid Eye 3D goggles.

MUSIC

I don't listen to music on my PSP because I've got the Offspring MP3s loaded into my cell phone.

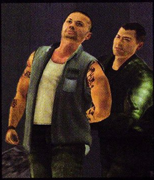
WEB

I use it to check up on American game sites like 1UP.

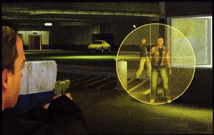
24™

THE GAME

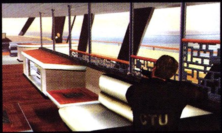
Experience the untold story between Seasons 2 and 3



Interrogate and conduct surveillance on suspects



An adrenaline rush of espionage, gunfights and car chases



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MATURE 17+ M Blood Violence ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PlayStation®2

cambridge IMAGINE TELEVISION 20th CENTURY FOX TELEVISION 2K

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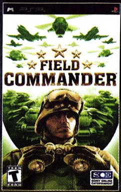
THIS MEANS WAR!

It's a dangerous world out there, and only you can save it from total destruction.



Take control of a powerful army in a no-holds-barred battle for supremacy with Field Commander™ for the PSP™ (PlayStation®Portable) system. But be warned: these turn-based wars will test your wits and challenge your mettle as a general.

Command 36 different land-, sea-, and air-based forces such as foot soldiers, battleships, and bombers, on gorgeous 3D battlefields. Order your special operatives to use long-range artillery strikes on unwitting foes. Move your infantry into a factory to capture its production and turn out new units for your side. Tear the heart out of the enemy's defenses with an unstoppable armored blitzkrieg, and then win the fight by taking control of his headquarters. Call in air strikes to soften up foes in defensive positions. Seize the high ground to give your forces a tactical advantage and witness the devastating effects of your strikes.

With more than 30 single-player missions, 15 different army divisions, and 11 generals to choose from, Field Commander offers lots of strategic options. As commander-in-chief, you'll need to pit strength against weakness and utilize all the special abilities at your disposal to defeat an increasingly difficult and ruthless enemy army bent on world domination.

Even after you've won the war in the game's deep story mode, the battles rage on. You can take the fight across the globe with multi-player battles via the PSP™ system's Internet and wireless. Or create your own battlegrounds and combat missions, and then share them with other players, regardless of whether they're in the same room or continents away.

Defeat is not an option. Surrender has been removed from the dictionary and your vocabulary. Use the greatest weapon of all-your brain. Or die trying.

The war begins this March.

Detailed terrain and explosive effects bring these battles to life; tanks spit fire, cannons roar, guns chatter. Load your troops onto armored carriers and then quickly move them along the roads. Barricade your forces inside of cities. Execute ambushes from the cover of forests. Field Commander lets you use the battlefield to your tactical advantage.

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FIELD COMMANDER

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PlayStation.Portable

TEEN
Blood
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
Game Experience May Change During Online Play.

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Game experience may change during online play.

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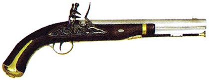
pause WHEN YOU'RE NOT PLAYING GAMES

FEEL

F113 HELLCAT

Confederate Motorcycles (www.confederate.com)

Sweet lord! If someone from the future were to travel back in time to save the world from exploding or being taken over by an army of rampaging eggplants, then surely he or she would be riding this motorcycle from Confederate Motorcycles. The F113 Hellcat is not only obscenely awesome looking, but it's also 1800cc, and anyone familiar with the *Mario Kart* games knows that's pretty darn fast.

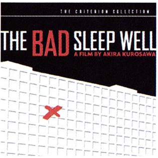


PIRATE GUNS

Davide Pedersoli (www.davide-pedersoli.com)

The only reason we're game journalists is because we can't be pirates. But if you gave us the choice to swap out our DualShock controllers for a ship's wheel, we'd be sailing the seven seas. Eye patches affect our ability to play games, which is why we're enamored with pirate guns—even though we're chained to our desks, having one of these babies strapped on still puts the swash in our buckle.

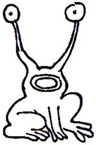
SEE



THE BAD SLEEP WELL

Akira Kurosawa
(www.criterionco.com)

If you thought Hamlet was way too Danish, and that director Akira Kurosawa and actor Toshiro Mifune only made samurai movies, then you should check out this DVD. Mifune plays a corporate executive who seemingly marries his boss' daughter to get ahead in the company, but in actuality, he's working on a plan to avenge his father's death. It's a snazzy blend of *Hamlet* and postwar Japanese corporate culture.

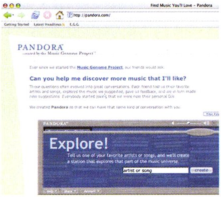


THE DEVIL AND DANIEL JOHNSTON

Daniel Johnston
(www.hihowareyou.com)

Most people who have bipolar disorder and live in their parents' basements don't really have big professional successes. Daniel Johnston, however, rose above that to become one of the most revered underground artists and musicians, inspiring people ranging from Kurt Cobain to Matt Groening. Now, a film portrait of the man and his unusual genius is finally coming to theaters in limited release in March.

LISTEN


Find Music You'll Love - Pandora
http://pandora.com/
Getting Started
Latest Headlines
E.G.G.
PANDORA
created by the Music Genome Project

Ever since we started the Music Genome Project, our friends would ask:

Can you help me discover more music that I'll like?

Those questions often evolved into great conversations. Each friend told us their favorite artists and songs, explored the music we suggested, gave us feedback, and we in turn made new suggestions. Everybody started joking that we were now their personal DJs.

We created **Pandora** so that we can have that same kind of conversation with you.

Tell us one of your favorite artists or songs, and we'll create a station that explores that part of the music universe.

PANDORA

Music Genome Project (www.pandora.com)

Finding good new music can sometimes be tough. Your friends will always have suggestions, but let's be honest—your friends can have pretty crappy taste. Enter Pandora. It's a website that lets you build your own radio station of streaming music. Simply enter artist names, and Pandora will stream songs from other similar artists. If it plays something you don't like, simply click a button to remove that song from the broadcast for good. Get a free subscription with ads, or pay a fee to get an ad-free experience. Yay for music!

THE RICKY GERVAIS SHOW

Ricky Gervais (www.guardian.co.uk/rickygervais)

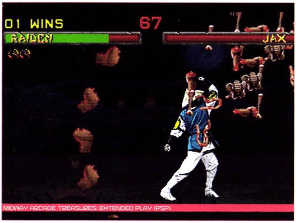
OK, most podcasts are just guys in their basements yammering about geeky stuff like mipmaps and router bitrates. What makes this one different is that it's two very nontechnical and hilarious guys—Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant (collaborators on *The Office* and *Extras*)—and their dim-witted associate Karl Pilkington, who spouts off the most bizarre opinions known to man. We'd like to try to explain the context of things like "flies and condoms," "vampire pirates," or "banana-dispensing spaceships," but it's better that you download and listen to this podcast yourself.

TRENDSPOTTER

COLLECT THEM ALL

For the love of good gravy, why are we seeing so many collections as of late? Look, we like old games as much as the next 20-plus-year-old demographic that these classic collections are geared toward, but we'd much rather see some new stuff than just a straight-up port. How about some new graphics and sound to go along with classic versions of the game? Is that too much to ask? If you really want an old game that badly, eBay is right around the corner, kids. Oh well, maybe it's for the best. We wouldn't want the industry to go all Ted Turner and perform the equivalent of adding color to films that simply were meant to remain in black and white.

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION REMIXED (PSP)



MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES: EXTENDED PLAY (PSP)

MEGA MAN X COLLECTION (PS2)

SONIC
THE HEDGEHOG
SEGA
SONIC MEGA COLLECTION (PS2)

©SEGA 1991

THEY JUST DON'T GET IT

STOP THE LEGISLATION TRAIN, I WANT TO GET OFF

Even after a similar bill was ruled unconstitutional in the state of California, a new proposed bill in Florida recently passed a state Senate committee. The law is designed to prevent the sale of M-rated games to children, an act that was deemed to violate the First Amendment right to freedom of speech by a U.S. District Court in California. The Florida bill also proposes that an "18" sticker be placed on all M-rated games and that stores be fined $1,000 if caught selling such games to minors. North Carolina, Maryland, and Illinois are all considering similar bills, leaving us to ask the question, when will the madness end?

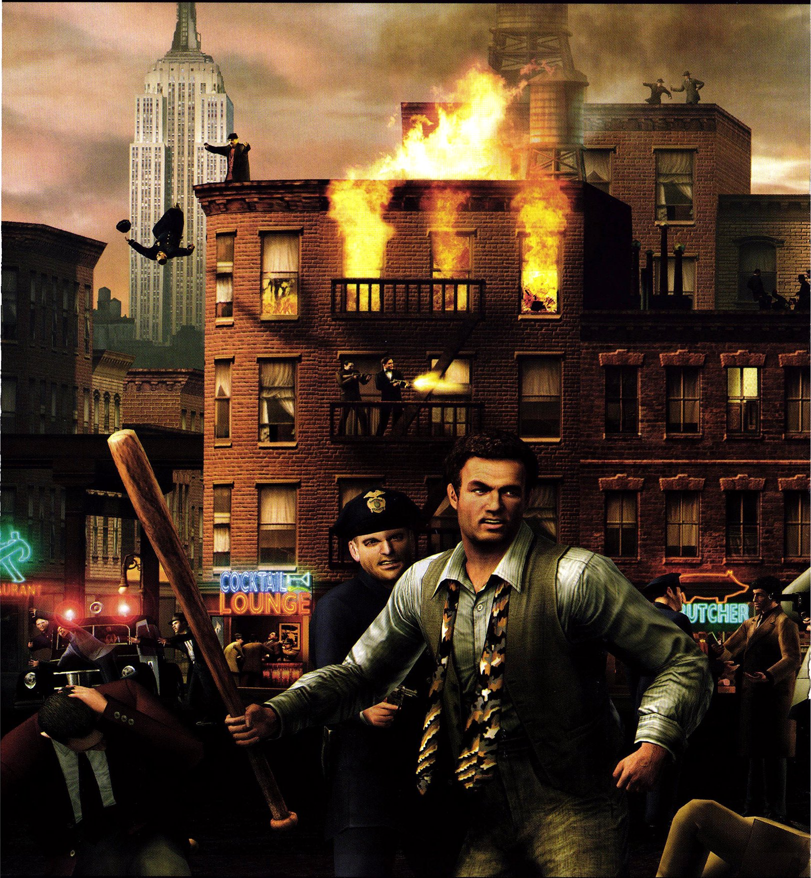
> A SIMILAR BILL WAS RULED UNCONSTITUTIONAL.

GAME ENVY

WHAT WE WANT ON THE PLAYSTATION: ANIMAL CROSSING: WILD WORLD

No, we haven't suddenly regressed into a staff of babies, but there are quite a few aspects of *Animal Crossing* for the DS that we're jealous of. This title demonstrates that a game that lacks shooting action and/or massively multiplayer gameplay can still build and foster an online community. Besides the online multiplayer community, *AC* also features open-ended gameplay in an easy-to-grasp package, which makes it one of the most mainstream-friendly games out there (we're fans of games that widen the market). Plus, we'd rather have a new and interesting game that emphasizes socializing, debt repayment, tree planting, letter writing, and T-shirt designing as opposed to yet another game that has a gun, or a sword, or a sword duct-taped to a gun.

GENCO
OLIVE OIL
PASTA
CHIANTI
OLIVES
PACKED IN ITALY
GENCO OLI
IMPORT C
GENCO
128



MATURE 17+

M

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes

XBOX

PC
DVD-ROM
SOFTWARE

$10 rebate for The Godfather DVD Collection in every game.*

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NEGOTIATE?

DANGER EXPLOSIVE

INTIMIDATE?

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The Godfather™
THE GAME

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ITALIAN-AMERICAN
RESTAURANT

Paramount®
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EA™

OIL
HOW WILL YOU PLAY THE GODFATHER? 03.2006

FAN SERVICE

LIFE AFTER GOD OF WAR

IF **you think** David Jaffe is some big-headed developer who lives in an ivory tower where good game ideas just drop into his head 365 days a year, well, he's not. He's a normal guy—a normal guy with a family and bills to pay. And while game development is still one of his numerous passions, the man behind *God of War*, like everyone else, still has to find the motivation to get up, get dressed, put on those shoes, and go to work every day. Find out what's next for the man who has been, quite literally, the talk of the videogame industry.

PHOTOS KATE RAMERO

OPM You mentioned in your blog recently that you ran into Tom Hanks and got a little starstruck. Does it ever occur to you that a kid walking down the street would get the same feeling if he or she knew that you were the guy behind *God of War*?

DAVID JAFFE What's interesting is that right after *God of War* came out, I did see my recognition go up a bit more. I was at Taco Bell a few weeks after it came out, and this guy was giving me my burritos, and he's like, "Aren't you the *God of War* guy?" I was really taken aback because it was the first time that anyone had really recognized me individually. It was kind of cool, but it was kind of a strange thing because I wanted to go back to Taco Bell—I dug it so much. Celebrities are cool and I get a charge when I see them, but I get embarrassed.

It's kind of strange when people treat you a little differently because you've done some interviews in magazines or you've been on the Internet. I don't know, I'm kind of rambling because I'm not really sure how I feel about it. It speaks to the very negative and damaging obsession our culture has with celebrity and fame and success. On one hand, I participate in it because it's enjoyable, but on the other hand, I think this is a bad thing that I don't really support. I'm always going out of my way to try and make it very clear to people that I'm just this normal guy and that everyone I've met in games, for the most part, are just normal guys and girls who make games. We're just people. I'm conflicted by the whole thing, frankly.

> "THERE ARE DAYS WHERE I JUST WANT TO F***ING GET OUT OF HERE AND GO SEE THE MOVIES."

OPM How does it make you feel knowing that these well-known developers—like Kojima and Miyamoto—have talked about you and *God of War*?

DJ It's funny because I was talking to my wife about this the other day, because of the *EGM* where Kojima and Miyamoto are talking about *God of War*. I actually ran into and met Kojima for the first time at the Hollywood Bowl. He came up to me and talked to me about *God of War*. I was really jazzed by that. This is amazing [because] these guys make games that I love and they're titans of the industry. The fact that they're aware of me, let alone enjoying what I'm doing and what the team I'm with is doing—that's pretty cool. But at the same time, it's weird because it goes back to that whole celebrity thing.

You know, the two biggest idols of my life are Steven Spielberg and Stan Lee. I met Steven Spielberg when I was 18 years old, and I was blown away. I could barely breathe because I was so in shock. Stan Lee and I had a sit-down meeting two weeks ago, sitting in his office face-to-face. After about five minutes, the starstruck onus fell away and he was just this guy. The same thing applies to Miyamoto and Kojima. You get to a position in your career where you're able to meet these people and make these connections, and from a creative standpoint, it's very exciting. It's very exciting to talk to Kojima about games. It's exciting to hear what Miyamoto has to say about games and what Stan Lee has to say about writing. From a personal standpoint, you think it's going to be more than it is—he's just a guy, and at the end of this Hollywood Bowl event, he's going to get into his car and drive home and I'm going to get into my car and drive home. It feels like it should be more than that, and it really isn't.

OPM So why do games? What drives you to do them? What's in it for you?

DJ That's a good question—it changes. Right now, as we speak, I'm definitely at a place where I'm questioning that myself. If you were looking at the years that I was doing the *Twisted Metal* series, the driving force back then was making it. Everyone has his or her own definition of what that means, but for me it was making enough money so that I was stable. I was a kid coming out of college with no money, and it was all about making enough money to support myself and to have a nice life. I also wondered, could I achieve a little bit of fame? I thought that was really important at the time and something I really thought I wanted. Can I do interesting work? Because I achieved those things with *Twisted Metal*, [I got to a point] where I don't care if I get fired. I don't care if this tanks my career. I want to work with a team to make the game I've always wanted to play, [*God of War*]. I'm going to give it my all, pour all of my energy into it, and damn the sacrifices, which were health and family and everything else. I think the game we ended up making turned out pretty well. I'm very proud of it and there's very little I would change. Now I find myself thinking I've done that, and so now I don't know what drives [me]. Some days, it's just the sheer enjoyment of doing the work, but all of the other stuff that used to drive me—the desire to make the ultimate game, money, a little bit of fame—all of those things have dropped away because I've achieved all of them. All I have right now is the work.

Right now, I'm sitting here at my whiteboard with my dry-erase marker and I'm trying to figure out how to get this level to work in our new game for the PSP. That's all there is. On one hand, that's nice because all of the bulls*** goes away and you ask yourself, do you truly enjoy the work of being a game designer? There are days where I find the answer is a resounding yes. I'm obsessed with it and I love it. Then there are days where I just want to f***ing get out of here and go see the movies because I'm so not in the creative zone. I don't know if that will be it for the rest of my career, if it'll all be about the work or if something else will come along. Ideally, it would be nice to get really, really rich off of this, but that isn't happening right now. We're certainly paid really well at Sony and in the industry. None of us, with the exception of a small few, is living up in a mansion in Malibu.

OPM So would you say you haven't reached a balance between your work and your personal life?

DJ I'm still struggling with the balance. I'm reading a book right now called *Memo From David O. Selznick*. It's basically a lot of the relevant memos while he was an executive at MGM and RKO. The subtext of it deals with it being his life. It was his obsession. You definitely get the sense that this guy never found the balance in his life, and for me, it would be so easy to abandon everything and just live in this office like I did during *God of War*. There's a part of me that would just love to do that. There's a part of me that would love to eat, sleep, and breathe this job because it's so much fun and so fulfilling when it works. But it really does come at a cost.

Today is Friday, as we're talking, and the weekend is coming. I can't wait to spend it with my wife and kids and get lost in things that aren't game related. But I know I'm going to be totally stressing over my game and wondering if it's good and wondering how we can make it good. It makes for an interesting weekend because you're being pulled in both directions. Both of them are important and both of them are things you're passionate about, but it's tough to find how to make both things work.

OPM If *God of War* was the ultimate game for you, has that ever made you wonder what you're supposed to be tackling next? Do you find yourself creating new challenges?

DJ That's the only thing that's driving me to do this new game with Incognito and the guys who I made the *Twisted Metal* series with. I love games and I love to play games that are fun, but I'm not a hardcore game guy. I love movies probably more than games. I love comic books more than games, just as a fan. I love games and I play them all week long, not just because it's my work—I genuinely love it. But my goal right now is, can we actually make a game that's emotional and has thematic, political, and emotional resonance? That challenge is enough to move me forward because it's very important to me, and that's the only reason why I'd like to keep making games in the capacity of a director. If it turns out this game doesn't work because it's not fun—and I don't think that's going to be the case; I think it's going to be more of a case of not getting the emotional stuff or political stuff to work—at that point I might hang up the hat from a director's standpoint. I'd still do the creative director job. I want to. I think I'm good at it and I like working at Sony. If we can't move the genre and the medium forward in the sense of starting to provide more relevant stories and emotions, then I really don't want to keep doing this.

OPM You've also mentioned that you have been changing as a designer. Has age been a factor in that? How do you know what works for you?

DJ I think that's just growth. You do it long enough and you start to realize what works and doesn't work for you personally. There are things I've gotten away from now. For example, the new game I'm doing has no cut-scenes—that's a criteria for the design. If we can't tell a story in the interactive, then it's not worth telling. [With] the game that we're doing now [*HL* for the PSP], I'm struggling with how heavy-handed we want to make the storytelling and the messaging versus just letting the player experience the interactive. So as I get older, I'm certainly embracing the interactivity or the interactive aspect of games, which is sort of an asinine thing to say because all games are interactive. If you look at *Twisted Metal: Black*, even though I'm still proud of aspects of that game, I still think it's very overdesigned. I put so much effort into the vibe, the emotion, and the stories—all of this periphery bulls*** that was cool and neat. It worked for a lot of people that

RÉSUMÉ

David Jaffe's worked on more than just *God of War*. Here's what else he's done:

Designer
Mickey Mania
1994

Lead Game Designer
Twisted Metal
1995

Director, Producer
Dark Guns
Cancelled (1996)

Director
Twisted Metal: Black
2001

Director
God of War
2005

Codirector
HL
Not Yet Released

played it, but I'm at a place now where if I can't convey that information and that nuance through the interactive, then I should be making movies.

You get to a point where you play enough games that you can step back and see what the player's response is to what you're doing. With the exception of people who are just really easy or really willing to suspend disbelief, most of that stuff in the noninteractive doesn't really work for a lot of people. It's just really a waste of resources and time. So as a game designer I want to do more and more, if not everything, through the interactive space. It's like, if [someone says] games are emotional or they're art, they're usually talking about the cut-scenes in between the game. That's certainly not the case with the game *Ico*, where they brilliantly managed to blend the thematic and the gameplay into one, and it's a great inspiration and resource for me.

A lot of great games get by on their periphery stuff, and people talk about them with such reverence that the interactive is creating that emotion, when, in essence, it's the cut-scenes, music, or the lighting of the scene as opposed to what you're doing with the controller.

OPM That seems to happen with the *Metal Gear* games. It's a series that has these great cut-scenes and this strong cinematic feel to it, but some people don't want to have anything to do with the cut-scenes.

DJ *Metal Gear* is a good example. It's one my favorite series of all time, and I'm a huge Kojima fan, but I agree. It's almost like a collage of multimedia coming together to create this experience. And that's great; it works for *Metal Gear*. But I agree with you in that for the average person, who isn't a gamer or who really isn't really willing to suspend disbelief to that limit, it probably doesn't work.

I was profiled [in a magazine] with a bunch of other game creators. Miyamoto was in there. Will Wright was in there. It was in the Southwest Airlines magazine, and a bunch of people in my hometown in Alabama read it. My parents brought it out during Thanksgiving because I hadn't seen it. I read this thing and the way they're writing about games and game designers, and if I'm a person that doesn't really play games or hasn't played a game since the arcade days, I would say, "This sounds great." I'd go out and pick up a game and play it. In my mind, the experience for a nongamer walking into a traditional videogame store in the mall, all the way through buying the game, bringing the game home, hooking it up, and playing it—they're going to be disappointed that the experience doesn't match the hype in the article. You really have to be of a certain mind-set and have a certain willingness to enjoy games at the level [at which] we all walk around claiming that they are, in terms of art and emotion. It's not that they can't see that, but we shouldn't be holding any "mission accomplished" parades quite yet.

OPM You chose the PSP for the type of game that you're doing, but people would generally assume that you would need the PS3 to power the elements that we need to make games emotional.

DJ First of all, most people who talk about games, read about games, and play games are game designers. They don't devote their time and energy to what actually makes a game work, and they shouldn't. That's not a criticism; it's just the way it is. So what they're left with is what they see and hear—the most obvious things. Oh, look, we're going to get better facial animation, and that's right. You're going to get more emotion through a character that animates well and has a lot of resolution in its facial features. That stuff ultimately is cool looking, and I think it's great that we're getting out there with better graphics, but I'm playing *Call of Duty 2* right now on the Xbox 360. It's a fun game, but I don't feel any more of an emotional response to it simply because the graphics are more realistic. The graphics on any game fall away within the first 10 or 15 minutes, and you're pretty much left with the interactive experience. Are you mentally engaged in what you're doing?

It wasn't a conscious decision to go to the PSP to get away from higher-end graphics. It was a choice for a different reason. I'm only interested if I can achieve—and if the team I'm working with can achieve—an emotional impact or a story impact via what makes a game a game: interactivity.

OPM How has the way that you grew up influenced the way that you make games or your work ethic?

DJ I'm putting together a talk for the DICE conference, and of the pictures I'm putting in my slide show, one is the old Service Merchandise where my parents used to take me to buy games, and the other is a Red Lobster where me and my brother would go after going to the Service Merchandise and we'd wait on our food. We'd be dying to play the game, and all we had was just the box and the instruction manual that we'd be pouring over at dinner. I've never forgotten what it was like, how special it was to drop $40 or $50 on a game and how important entertainment was since we didn't have a lot of money. Even though I don't make games for little 8-year-old boys, I'm always thinking about being an 8-year-old kid and how special that was, to buy a game with my dad. We really are asking for a large financial commitment on the part of the consumer, and we have a very big responsibility to entertain them and fulfill them. It's always something that I remember and carry with me, and I'm happy about that. I know a lot of people who get a little jaded. We get so many free games that it's really important to step back and realize that most people aren't that fortunate in this sense and that these are important purchases for them.

In terms of work ethic, I think growing up with very little money definitely makes you work a lot harder because in the back of your mind you're always afraid that you're going to end up without any money. You work really hard to make a lot of money and you save it. I'm not living in a mansion or anything, but it's nice to have worked at a company as generous as Sony so I don't have to work for a long time if I don't want to. I can let creative decisions guide me a lot more. If they came to me and said, "OK, Jaffe, your job is now to reinvigorate the *GameDay* license," I would say, "I think it's time we part ways, but I appreciate the 13 years you guys have given me."

OPM Do your family members get what you do? Were they supportive of you when you were first starting out in the industry?

DJ My family is pretty much always supportive of me [and of] what my brother and sister do—almost to a fault. They've been incredibly supportive and incredibly proud. They don't really get what I do. They've been with games since the Atari days and they gave me quarters for the arcade. I showed my dad a strategy guide that had a DVD walkthrough of *God of War*, and that's the first time he was able to get a sense of what the game is. He's 78 years old, so he's not going to sit down and pick up a controller and start ripping skeletons in half or having threesomes with naked chicks in the bed. [*Laughs*]

OPM Does that lack of legitimacy this industry has amongst the mainstream push parents to keep their kids away from wanting to design or even just play games?

DJ Parents push kids away from games. Parents want their kids to do well and succeed and have money and not struggle. So they'll push them to be a doctor or lawyer, but I don't think that has anything to do with the image of games. In most creative endeavors—be it acting, writing, or directing movies—if you're the kind of parent that doesn't want to let your kid explore those avenues because you're afraid he or she won't have a paycheck, that's a bigger problem than just image. I think it's bad and irresponsible parenting. I think you have to let your kids find their own passion.

In terms of image, when I went to the mall with my family, we went into a prominent game chain store, and after I had gone into that store, I went into the Disney Store with my daughter. The difference was just night and day. The carpet in the game store is soiled with who knows what, and the store reeks of what my wife calls "nerd sweat." There are crappy, used boxes with stickers all over them. The salespeople are trying to sell you everything but the thing you wanted to buy. Then you go next door to the Disney Store and it's well lit and clean. The items look brand new and they're just dying to be purchased and taken home.

> "THERE ARE A LOT OF THINGS WE'RE DOING TO KEEP THE MAINSTREAM AWAY FROM THIS FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT."

We have this great entertainment medium and we don't promote it from a retail standpoint. There are a lot of things we're doing to keep the mainstream away from this form of entertainment. The big players need to sit down, [hit] a reset button, and rethink this thing from the standpoint of game design, retail, and the cost of our products.

OPM What do you see yourself doing in five years?

DJ Let me see, I'll still be finishing the current game I'm working on if my last game schedule was any indication. [*Laughs*] Realistically, I would like to be working on a sequel to the PSP game we're working on now, which is *HL*. Then, I would like to be very proud of and successful at my job as creative director here in Sony Santa Monica and [know] that the vast majority of stuff that we've released from this studio has been critically and commercially well received. In my gut, I want to be retired and teaching spin classes in Malibu.

For an extended version of this interview, visit opm.1UP.com.

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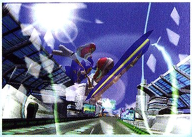

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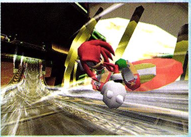

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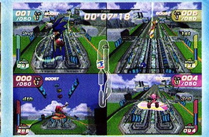

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15th SONIC SONIC TEAM SEGA

ZOE FLOWER

Zoe Flower is a freelance writer who lacks the slightest bit of musical talent. However, she is convinced she could join Ozzy Osbourne any time he needs a rocking rendition of "Bark at the Moon." But not on the hard level. That's just ridiculous.

ZOE FLOWER

HIGH-RES HEROINE

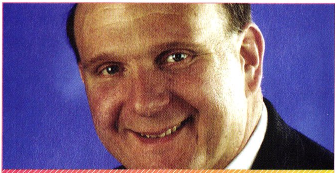
I can't get over the fact that it is the year 2006! As a teenager, I likely would have imagined myself to be driving a flying car and looking outside into a dystopian *Blade Runner* future at this point in my life. Instead, I'm teasing my hair, donning blue eye shadow, and jumping around with a plastic guitar in my hands as if it were still 1988. Granted, I have become a *Guitar Hero* addict—yes, a guitar heroine, as I like to call myself—but what I've been thinking about more is the way that the further we go into the future, the more it seems we relate to the past.

Guitar Hero has given me a great deal to think about—as well as a left hand that is fondly referred to as "the claw," not to mention the added bonus of a chance to reconnect with my nonvideogame friends who would always avoid party invites for fear my competitive nature would suggest a little head to head in *Burnout* or *SSX*—friends who are now knocking on my door at all hours to strum along to Boston and David Bowie. It seems that for all our cell-processing efforts to shape the future with technological advances and high-definition details, we're still suckers for the simple things in life. With my fingers darting across a guitar controller that could double as a Fisher-Price children's toy, I barely have time to consider the game's graphics or framerates or audio quality. I resolve that 2006 will be all about plain and simple fun (of course, I resolve it will be at 1080p).

I was thinking about this while nodding off briefly during Peter Jackson's remake of *King Kong*. For all the fancy effects and technological wonders, the film just didn't GRAB me. And it made me realize that games are no longer following Hollywood, but it is now the other way around (did anyone else feel like the drawn-out action sequences were planted just to be made into a videogame or theme park ride?). The *King Kong* game resonated more with me, thanks to the simplicity of its presentation and the brilliant design talents of Michel Ansel (think *Rayman* and *Beyond Good & Evil*). I also felt that some of the music would have been fun to play in *Guitar Hero*.... Oh God make it stop! I swear this addiction is worse than *Burnout*'s side effect of making me want to crash into real cars. Now I just walk around doing air guitar in random places to the '80s playlist on my iPod.

So before I get back to my guitar, I leave you with a thought. Are you attracted to the PS3 because of its technology or because of a lineup of games that reminds you of the simple pleasures of the past?

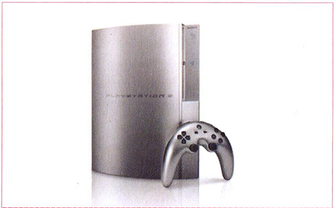
> "GAMES ARE NO LONGER FOLLOWING HOLLYWOOD; IT IS NOW THE OTHER WAY AROUND."



THE AGONY OF DEFEAT

DESPITE LOSSES, MSOFT STILL FIGHTING FOR MARKET SHARE

In a recent *Investor's Business Daily*, Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer commented on the Xbox 360's role in Japan versus the PlayStation 3's, saying, "I'm not sure we're going to beat Sony in Japan this generation. Maybe. But we're going to beat Sony [overall]." His outlook on the North American market seems to be driven by the lack of concrete information on the PS3, its games, or even its pricing. "Nobody knows when PlayStation 3 is going to come. The rumors are it will come out in the spring, but only in Japan. And nobody knows what PlayStation 3 is going to cost," said Ballmer. "PlayStation 3 has a drive built in, so who knows what the heck they're going to charge for the thing, because those are very expensive drives." Ballmer ended his tirade with, "And Sony has no strategy for an online service." Big words from Microsoft, especially in light of an Xbox 360 launch mired by product shortfalls (less than 500,000 had been sold in North America as of December), unit defects, a lack of new games, and a confusing pricing strategy. Has the so-called console war ended before it's even begun?



THE COST OF GAMING

MOVIN' ON UP

While Sony hasn't been forthcoming on many PlayStation 3 details, industry analysts and other such like-minded professionals have started to speculate on the price of the PS3 based on components and market conditions. A number of analysts were asked in a recent CNN.com article what they thought would ultimately be the price of the console. American Technology Research's PJ McNealy said that a $499 price point is likely, though it's also possible that it may come in around $399. The reason for the higher price stems from the PlayStation 3's proprietary components and brand-new technology, including a new CPU technology and a new storage format. It's expected that a conference within the next few months will reveal the console's price in Japan as well as an initial lineup of launch games.

> THE HIGHER PRICE STEMS FROM THE PS3'S PROPRIETARY COMPONENTS.

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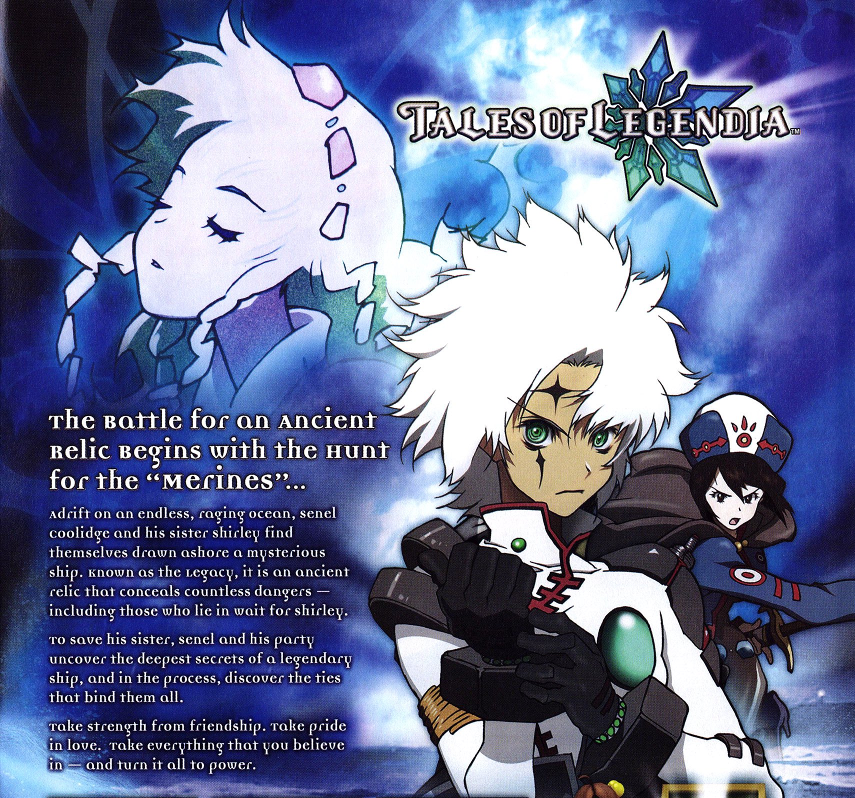

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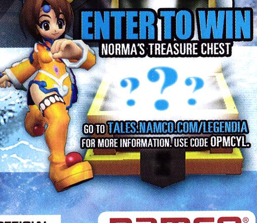

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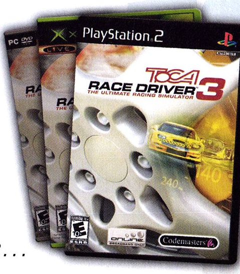

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J-TOWN

GAMING NEWS FROM THE EAST

Reports of the Japanese game industry's demise have been greatly exaggerated.

Exaggerated, but not completely fabricated; there's no denying that the Japanese game industry is in the midst of some tough times. During the PS1 days, even mediocre tripe like *Saga Frontier* managed to sell over a million copies domestically; nowadays, even big-budget games are lucky to pass 200,000 copies. The market's still vibrant, healthy, and expanding overseas—so what's wrong with the Japanese gaming market?

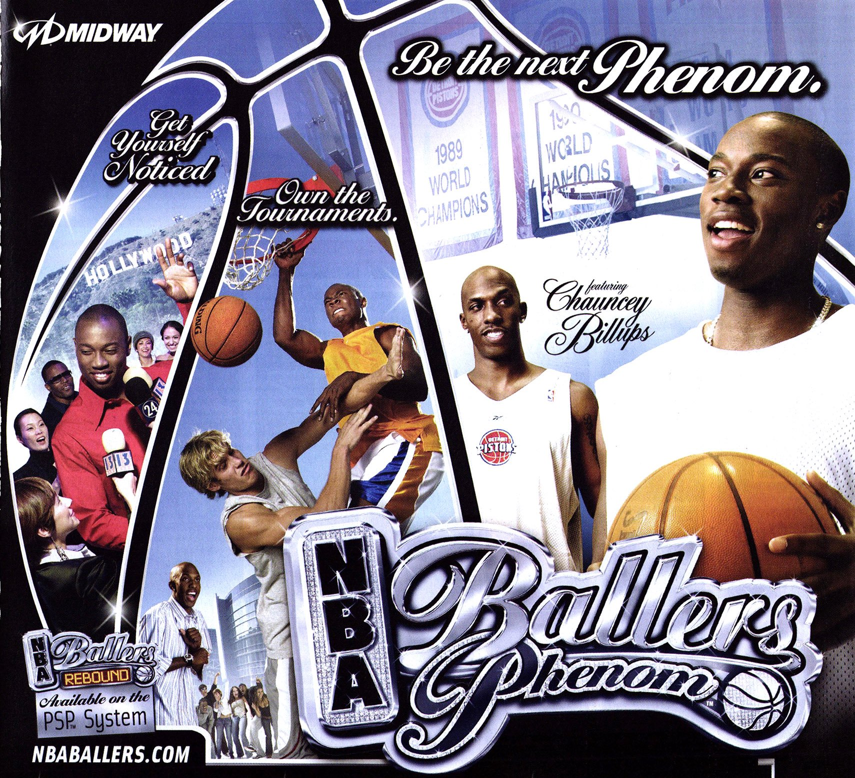
Conventional wisdom holds that cell phones and the used-game market are responsible, and the effect of those two is impossible to ignore. The Internet got off to a rocky start in Japan; until 2002, draconian legislation limited companies to a single domain name and forced expensive hosting with a small cadre of "accredited" ISPs. Also, Japan's national telecom monopoly charges high per-minute rates, even on local calls. Customers decided that if they had to pay per-minute, they might as well go portable, and a proprietary "Internet" of phone-based services soon sprung up. Consequently, gamers with 20 minutes to kill on the train ride to work *could* bring a PSP (and many do), but they already *have* a phone. The cell-phone division is the most profitable sector of even huge companies like Namco, Konami, and Square Enix. With low development costs, a huge install base, and digital distribution, cell-phone gaming is a publisher's dream. But every dollar spent on cell-phone gaming is a dollar that doesn't go to console gaming, so the market shrinks.

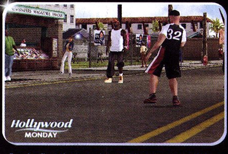
The used-game market has a more direct impact on the industry. Games in Japan are more expensive than in America—*Dragon Quest VIII*, for example, costs 8,800 yen, or nearly $75 U.S. dollars. That's a lot of money. After completing a game, most gamers look to recoup whatever part of their "investment" they can: enter the used-game shop. Unlike the scratched-up, $2-off-MSRP crap that passes for used in America, used Japanese software comes in immaculate condition—and substantially discounted. Let's take *Dragon Quest VIII* as an example. Stores might buy that $75 game back for $60 the first two weeks, $50 the next two weeks, and $30 the following month, and sell it for $70, $60, and finally $40. Rapidly dropping prices encourage gamers to play through a game as quickly as possible and resell it—meaning the same copy shows up in stores again and again. High turnover means high buyback prices, which is good news for gamers and used-game shops. Developers and publishers aren't happy, though—they never see a single yen of any transaction after the first one.

So while these are the most common reasons given for the troubles in the Japanese game industry, I feel there's another, more serious problem: the games themselves. Faced with a shrinking market, developers are slashing the budgets of even A-list games, turning "completely new experiences" into "more of the same" and ignoring the possibility of attracting new gamers in favor of chasing a safer, established audience.

> SQUARE-ENIX SOLD 900,000 COPIES OF KINGDOM HEARTS II IN ITS FIRST THREE DAYS.

Yet despite all these hurdles, in December, three major PS2 RPGs scored major hits: SCEI's *Rogue Galaxy* (240,000 copies), Namco's *Tales of the Abyss* (400,000 copies), and Square Enix's *Kingdom Hearts II* (1 million copies). What do these three games have in common? Simple: They weren't half-assed. The developers got the time and money they needed to deliver the top-class product that gamers expect, and gamers responded by actually buying the software. Fancy that! Gamers aren't stupid—they can smell a churned-out piece of placeholder product from three miles away. But give them a high-quality, state-of-the-art, nothing-else-like-it *game*—something they actually want and have a reason to play—and they'll turn out to buy it in droves. Even in beleaguered Japan. | *Andrew Vestal*





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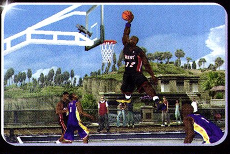

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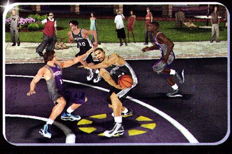

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THE MONTH AHEAD FOR YOU AND YOUR PLAYSTATION

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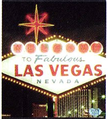


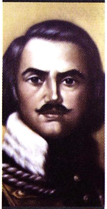
19

Nevada made it much easier to throw away your money in 1931 when it legalized **gambling**.

26

Yo-ho-ho! We plan on raising a bottle of rum to saucy lass **Keira Knightley**, who is 21.

MONDAY



06

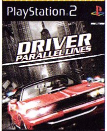
If you're in Chicago, raise up your beer steins for **Casimir Pulaski Day**! If you're not, well, skip the toast. (But you can still raise your steins and drink. Root beer, of course.)

20

The **Game Developers Conference** begins today in San Francisco.

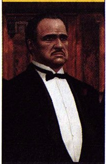
TUESDAY

NEW GAMES



07

Read between the lines, jackasses—the next installment in the ***Driver*** series comes out today.



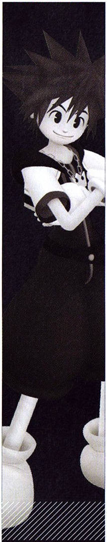
14

It's **Pi Day**! It's also the day that we'll say a long-overdue farewell to all those references to offers you can't refuse, etc., as ***The Godfather*** comes out at last. Or buy ***MGS3: Subsistence*** and ***Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams*** instead.

NEW GAMES

WEDNESDAY

NEW GAMES



01

Kingdom Hearts II sold 900,000 copies in its first three days on sale in Japan. Do Americans love the Disney that much? Today's the day we'll find out.

NEW GAMES

THURSDAY

02

A day of tall tales: ***King Kong*** premiered in 1933, and **Wilt Chamberlain** was still so excited about it in 1962 that he went and scored 100 points against the Knicks.

16

VH1 reality show whore **Flava Flav** turns 47 today. What time is it, Flav? Time to get a real job.

30

What is the reason Alex Trebek doesn't have to collect unemployment checks? ***Jeopardy*** debuts in 1964.

FRIDAY

NEW FLICKS

V FOR VENDETTA
MARCH 17

17

In the future, **St. Patrick's Day** will be celebrated by shaving one's head, as anyone who goes to see ***V for Vendetta*** will be able to attest.

24

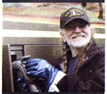
Plan a surprise party—your PSP turns 1 year old.

31

I see London, I see France, I see Sharon Stone without any underpants in ***Basic Instinct 2***.

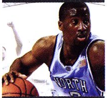
NEW FLICKS

SATURDAY



18

It's **National Biodiesel Day**! Buy a gallon of Willie Nelson's own personal brand of biodiesel, BioWillie, to celebrate!



25

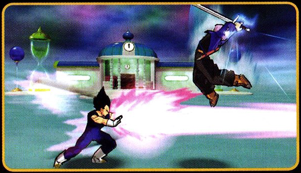
It's the start of the regional championships for **March Madness**. Simulate the tournament on your PS2 and then place bets based on the results.

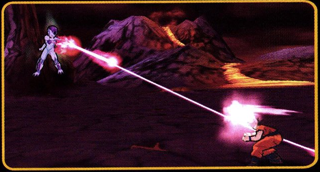
Evil isn't taking a break.

DRAGON BALL Z® SHIN BUDOKAI

Play DBZ® wirelessly on the PSP™ (PlayStation® Portable) system.

Dragon Ball Z®: Shin Budokai is the first DBZ game created for the PSP system! Wage wars over wireless networks as you battle other players live, anywhere in the world! But be warned, this is one of the most explosive DBZ games ever unleashed. And it's only on the PSP system.





TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Cartoon Violence

FUNIMATION® ENTERTAINMENT
A NAVARRE CORPORATION COMPANY

PlayStation

PSP PlayStation Portable

ATARI

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
- Crude Humor
- Mild Language
- Suggestive Themes
- Use of Alcohol and Tobacco
- Violence

PlayStation®2

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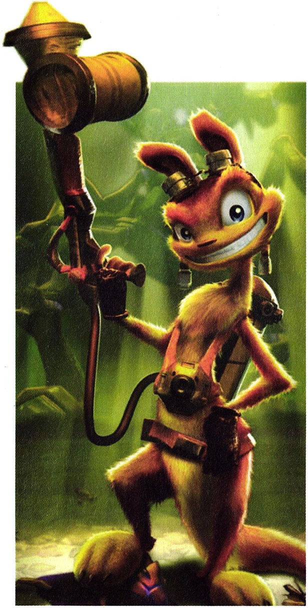
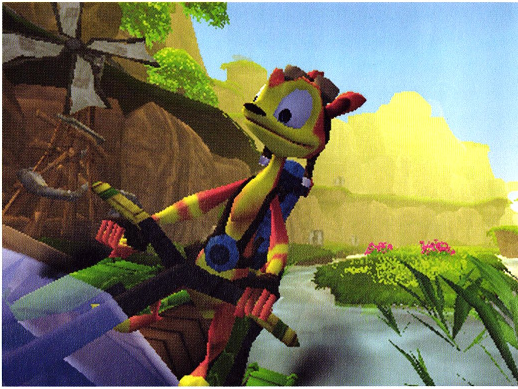
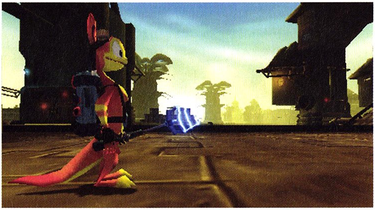
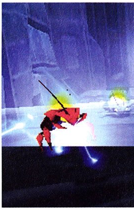






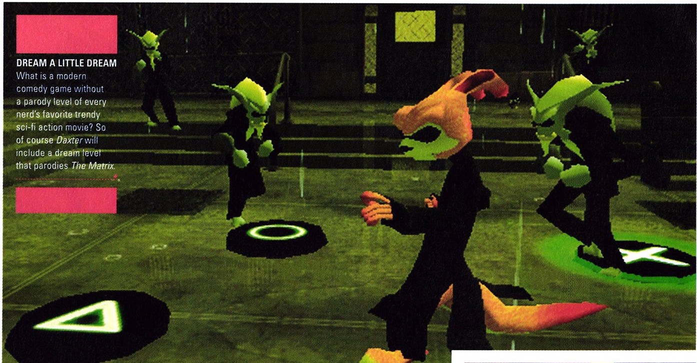


PSP

daxter

An ottsel odyssey

PUB. SCEA **DEV.** Ready at Dawn **RELEASE** March



DREAM A LITTLE DREAM
What is a modern comedy game without a parody level of every nerd's favorite trendy sci-fi action movie? So of course *Daxter* will include a dream level that parodies *The Matrix.*

***Prince of Persia* did it.** *Ratchet* did it as well. But it was the *Jak and Daxter* series that kicked off the recent "good guys going bad" trend. In *Jak II*, "Dark Jak" let players go wild, which had its advantages, but many missed the innocent times of the original game. For those players, Ready at Dawn is making *Daxter*, in which players follow Daxter's travels after he escapes during Jak's capture in *Jak II*'s introduction.

But while Daxter's goal in the game is to save Jak, he tends to get distracted. Amongst plenty of platforming levels, the little guy will eliminate bugs as an exterminator, participate in crop-dusting missions, ride around Haven City on a scooter, and dream his way into some of the craziest levels this side of *Psychonauts*. One of these dream levels we checked out mimics the Helm's Deep scene from *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*—the player controls "Daxter Gimli" and hacks away at enemies who are climbing up the ladders below and trying to overtake the castle. Also, thanks to tricks the developer has learned on *Jak*, the load times won't be lengthy.

Additionally, the bug-battling multiplayer (think *Battle Bots*), stunning visuals, and "interoperability" with *Jak X* on PS2 (where you can unlock the Daxtermobile) have it shaping up to be of the better original titles on the PSP. It's about time we started having these!

BEING READY AT DAWN

After noticing some quality-control trouble when the *Crash Bandicoot* franchise left its hands, Naughty Dog is closely overseeing the creation of *Daxter*. In fact, Ready at Dawn was started by one of Naughty Dog's own, Didier Malenfant, an industry veteran who previously worked at Interplay and Shiny. "*Jak II* went gold on Friday, and on Monday morning I was looking for office space for Ready at Dawn," he recalls.

Despite one of his employees referring to *Jak II* as "the game that hates you" (due to some unusually challenging difficulty spikes), Malenfant says the reason he left Naughty Dog had nothing to do with *Jak II*; he left for the challenge of trying something new. "It's about wanting to know more about how a game gets made from start to finish," he says, and then adds, laughing, "Of course, the flip side is that I now feel like I know too much."

> DAXTER WILL DREAM HIS WAY INTO SOME OF THE CRAZIEST LEVELS THIS SIDE OF PSYCHONAUTS.

Interestingly enough, Ready at Dawn employs many staff members with little or no previous game-industry experience, which seems appropriate given that its game stars a sidekick and is being developed for Sony's little-brother console, the PSP.

IN THE BEGINNING...

Springtime means new beginnings, and here at *OPM* Central, we decided to help in our own way by checking out the beginning areas of these upcoming games. Some hooked us for days, and others we played for just a few minutes. Which ones? Read on to find out....

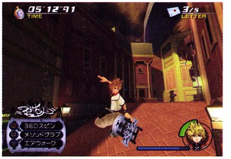
KINGDOM HEARTS II

IT'S A LONG ROAD TO THE MAGIC KINGDOM! WE BRING YOU A BLOW-BY-BLOW ACCOUNT OF THE PROLOGUE TO KINGDOM HEARTS II

PUB. Square Enix DEV. Square Enix RELEASE Spring

カイリを助けなくちゃ!

ここで何をしているんだ?



Square Enix loves to keep us guessing—that's the only explanation for the opening hours of *Kingdom Hearts II*. Here we figured we'd jump in and have a jolly stroll through the Magic Kingdom with Sora, Goofy, and Donald. Instead, we spent six days (about four hours in-game) with a kid named Roxas in the Disney-free zone of Twilight Town, picking up after *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories* (2004's GBA sequel).

Sure, it has keyblades and *Final Fantasy* cameos aplenty, but *KH2*'s prelude is hardly what we expected—which is why we're recounting our adventures in Twilight Town for your sake. Be prepared!

DAY ONE

Roxas starts his morning by meeting his pals Hayner, Pence, and Olette and coming to terms with the game's control schemes. Handily, Seifer Almasy (Squall's rival from *Final Fantasy VIII*) and his cohorts Raijin and Fujin contribute to Roxas' education through some 1-on-1 combat. It's at this point that you can choose your preferred combat style: offensive, defensive, or magical.

Initially, Roxas uses a big blue Nerf bat for fighting, but after chasing a mysterious Heartless-like creature called a Nobody to an abandoned mansion in the woods, the harmless toy weapon turns into a keyblade, which allows Roxas to kick the Nobody's butt (unlike the blue bat, which allowed him to kick *nobody's* butt). Roxas also learns about his handy new evasion abilities during the encounter outside the mansion—pressing the Triangle button at certain points in combat allows him to evade an enemy attack and get in a few free licks.

INITIALLY, ROXAS USES A BIG BLUE NERF BAT FOR FIGHTING, BUT THE TOY TURNS INTO A KEYBLADE.

DAY TWO

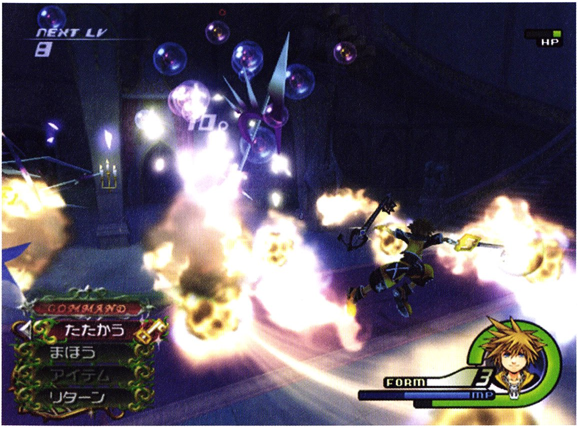
Our second day with Roxas begins with him and his compadres running around collecting money for train fare. Roxas must perform three different temp jobs: juggling a ball as a street performer, delivering letters via skateboard, or pushing a cart full of luggage up a hill. After hitting his goal, he meets up with his pals at the train station, only to have his Munnies swiped by Axel, a jerk in a black cloak.

DAY THREE

A mysterious girl appears (you might recognize her as Naminé from *Chain of Memories*, but Roxas doesn't) and is soon followed by a whole bunch of Nobodies. Meanwhile, Roxas finds himself in a vast

SECRET SORA

Last time we interviewed *Kingdom Hearts II* director Tetsuya Nomura, he was especially cagey. Even a question about how the game begins was met with a sly grin and an "I can't comment on that." Now that we've played it, we can see why he didn't want to spoil the fact that you don't even play as Sora for the first few hours! Sneaky Nomura!


NEXT LV
8
HP
COMMAND
たたかう
まほう
アイテム
リターン
FORM
3
MP

NEXT LV
302
COMMAND
たたかう
まほう
リターン

60HIT
MAX HIT 75
LIMIT GAUGE
HP
COMMAND
たたかう
DRIVE
MAX
4

SORA SORRY
If you want to eat up all sorts of info about *Kingdom Hearts II*, you can check out our sister mag *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. Witness the power of ZD synergy!

0HIT
MAX HIT 138
LIMIT GAUGE
ログフレア
たたかう
メガドナフレア
DRIVE

HIT
MAX HIT 183
LIMIT GAUGE
HP
COMMAND
たたかう
DRIVE
MP

HIT
MAX HIT 75
LIMIT GAUGE
HP
ノックラッシュ
ノックラッシュ
DRIVE
MAX
4

space with a stained glass floor...a near-identical setup to Sora's keyblade trial, except that instead of Disney princesses on the floor, there's an image of Sora. At the end of the trial, Roxas encounters a massive Nobody who has devastating attacks that can only be countered with Triangle-button evasion techniques.

DAY FOUR

Roxas and his friends all take part in the Struggle Battle, the obligatory bracket-based brawlfest sponsored by one Setzer Gabbiani (who is the airborne opera lover from *Final Fantasy VI*). Roxas holds his own, even against *Final Fantasy IX*'s Vivi (who cheats like a little bastard), but Axel interrupts his actions by freezing time and then talking trash.

Roxas eventually wins the fight against Axel and gets back to the business of earning his trophy. But Axel sneaks in later and swipes one of the gems from the trophy. Then he brags about it while hanging out with Ansem—yep, "final boss of *Kingdom Hearts*" Ansem. You heard it here first: Axel is Japanese for "complete jerk."

DAY FIVE

After realizing his jewel has been swiped, Roxas finds himself in the middle of some strange occurrences, such as being attacked by his shadow and fighting an awful lot of Vivis at once (all of whom, it should be noted, still cheat like bastards). Plus, he keeps having strange flashbacks to Sora's adventure, and Naminé won't give him the full scoop as to why.

> YOU HEARD IT HERE FIRST: AXEL IS JAPANESE FOR "COMPLETE JERK."

DAY SIX

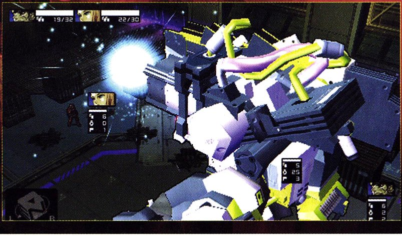
Things get even weirder for Roxas, and his friends don't even seem to recognize him. On top of that, Axel begins harassing him throughout Twilight Town. Bewildered, Roxas heads to the abandoned mansion in the woods, where he meets Naminé again. But just when she's about to reveal everything, DiZ, the mysterious dude from *Chain of Memories*, snags her and pulls her through a portal, leaving poor Roxas to find his way through the building on his own.

And what does Roxas get for his trouble? Yet *another* fight with Axel. On the plus side, he gets to use some totally bitchin' dual-wielded keyblades. Oh, and he finally finds out what his mysterious connection to Sora is. At which point the game begins properly....

METAL GEAR ACID 2

PSP

PUB. Konami **DEV.** Kojima Productions **RELEASE** Spring



THE GOGGLES, THEY DO SOMETHING!

00:00

Is it time put the "Solid Eye" 3D glasses on the PSP yet? Wait, the game just said to not use them until it specifically says to. So not yet.

00:02

First, a tutorial mission that looks like a trippier version of a typical level from *Metal Gear Solid: VR Missions*. Instead of utilizing virtual-reality-style wireframes and cold colors, this tutorial has a bizarre color scheme.

00:06

After finishing these decent tutorials, the story begins. Snake is grabbed by an FBI agent and told to break into a defense contractor to find a certain file. The mission starts.

00:07

Oh, now is the time you can go to the menu and turn on the Solid Eye mode!

00:08

Whoa, it actually works! The card menu seems to float in midair, and things like boxes and lampposts seem to stick out toward me. Card effects, like the Fury's (*MGS3*), are also in 3D.

00:15

Finishing the first mission unlocks the "Solid Eye Theater." A couple of *MGS3* cut-scenes are already unlocked, along with some surprises. Like a movie called "Survival Knife" that has a girl fondling a gun! Oh, Shinta Nojiri, you weren't kidding about putting 3D girls in your game.

EXIT
LET'S ROCK

PSP

PUB. Ubisoft **DEV.** Taito **RELEASE** February

Notes found in the 8th floor men's restroom at the *OPM* offices:

10:15 A.M.

First impressions are good. Nice art direction: colorful (someone likes orange) with fun, hip energy and cel shading. The character design is charmingly cartoony, and the main character: Mr. Esc.

10:30 A.M.

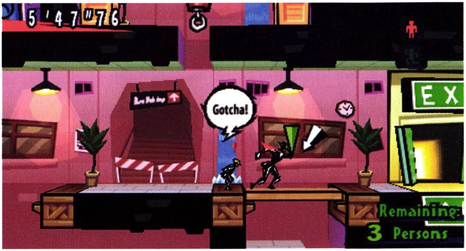
All missions begin with "Let's rock!"—cute. Main objective: Get Mr. Esc from point A to point B by jumping across gaps in the floor, climbing down ropes and ladders, and picking up items (like fire extinguishers) to put out flames and such. Lots of other obstacles.

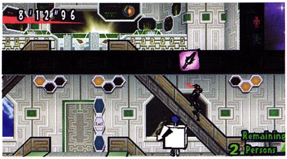
10:45 A.M.

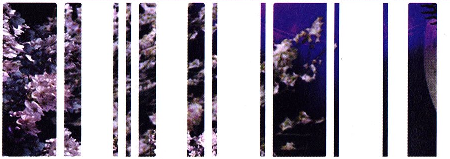
Further in, the stages get more complicated but not more difficult. Mr. Esc has to save people, but they can be used to help him multitask through tricky areas. Fat adults push heavy objects (safes mainly), kids crawl through small spaces, and thin adults put out fires and perform other functions while Mr. Esc focuses his attention elsewhere.

11:00 A.M.

Missions get more elaborate, tough even. First 20 or so were in an office building—other locales include a subway, a factory, and a hospital. Further highlights: fun, addictiveness, and humor (rescued victim: "I have to take a shower"), plus autosaves. Nicely done.







ONIMUSHA

DAWN OF DREAMS

PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom RELEASE March

WAKE UP, CUZ IT'S TIME TO TEAM UP!

00:03

You start as Soki, "The Oni of the Ash" or "The Blue Demon." Time to fight some demons! Stuff like "Hit Square to attack" and "Use Triangle for magic attacks" is being taught here. Oh, don't forget: Use X to absorb souls (which replenish health and mana or can be saved for weapon upgrades).

00:06

Ooh, now a boss fight with a humongous samurai. Run back and forth on the rooftop until he tries to smash Soki, and then swing Soki's mighty demon-slaying blade onto his hands. Occasionally, he'll spew fire. Whatever, dude.

00:09

After some bizarre cut-scenes, Soki talks to Minokuchi, who seems to be some kid who hangs upside down from the ceiling. You're destroying cherry trees and demons for some reason, but Soki can upgrade his sword and armor with the souls he's absorbed.

00:11

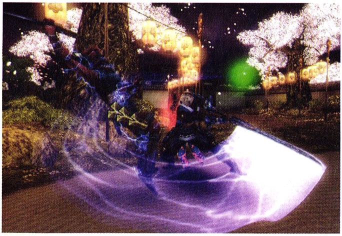
Soki meets Jubei Yagyu, a sassy ninja girl; they decide to have an uneasy cease-fire as they both zip around and fight enemies. You can heal her, but you can't control her yet.

00:18

Jubei and Soki go on a basic key hunt, and after then use the keys on a big, scary door and get thrown into a boss battle! The boss is a big fish thing with legs who vomits out demons! Ick. No real strategy is needed besides "dodge and use magic attacks." It's not much harder than the occasional "test of valor" (a timed action challenge to earn weapons and souls).

00:20

On the next mission, you start out as Jubei, but soon both Jubei and Soki are onscreen. And now, you can use the D-pad to issue basic commands to the AI partner and the L2 button to switch between the two characters. Nice! We'll hold off on playing the multicharacter action extensively until the review.



DRAKENGARD 2

FLYING DYNASTY WARRIORS

PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Taito RELEASE February

00:01

Drakengard 2's opening cut-scene explains how this game takes place after the zany incestuous events of the previous game, but with different people. You start off as a junior dragon knight named Nowe and—yay!—get to play through a typical tutorial! First Nowe runs around the room hitting things, then fights an actual person to pass the tutorial.

00:05

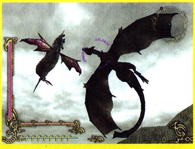
Now that the on-foot tutorial is finished, Nowe moves on to the one explaining the second major gameplay type: dragon flight. The dragon feels a bit like *Panzer Dragoon*'s; while flying, you sweep the aiming reticule across multiple objects while holding down the Square button to lock on to them, and then release it to fire off some, er, dragon fire.

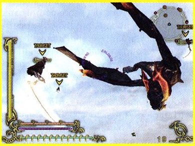
00:07

After practicing against some floating boxes, it's time to get into an actual mission. This time, Nowe is clearing out the enemy to help some friendly troops. You're also told about using L2 to hover in place. When it's time to hop off the dragon, hit Select and it's back to some *Dynasty Warriors*–style action on the ground. Judicious use of the Square and Triangle buttons results in snazzy-looking and powerful combo attacks.

00:13

Oh ho-ho, now by hitting R2, you can switch weapons on the weapon wheel (also from the previous game), and on top of that, switching weapons also switches characters. For now, you can switch between sword-swinging Nowe or spear-thrusting Eris. Eris has a weapon better suited for fighting weird monster dudes in narrow hallways, while Nowe's is fun to just swing around in the open field. After cutting through some more baddies and hopping on the dragon, the mission's over.





AT LEAST WHEN YOU DIE NOW, YOU WON'T DIE ALONE.

METAL GEAR GOES MULTIPLAYER.
Solid Snake just added a new weapon to his arsenal: the net. Introducing Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence with unprecedented online play. There are multiple players and online modes, a controllable third-person camera, a Secret Theater mode and four complete games in one: multiplayer online, an enhanced Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater, and the original Metal Gear and Metal Gear 2.

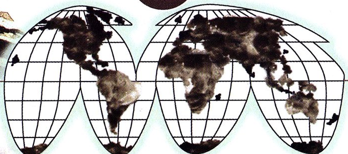
A MULTIPLAYER MISSION

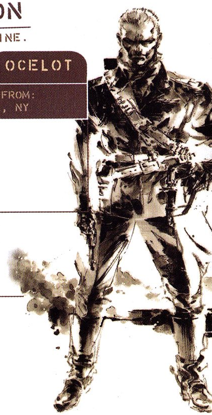
PLAY AGAINST OTHER AGENTS ONLINE.

SNAKE
PLAYING FROM:
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

VS

OCELOT
PLAYING FROM:
NEW YORK, NY





TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION
METAL GEAR SOLID® 3
SUBSISTENCE

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Language
Sexual Themes

PlayStation®2

ONLINE
BROADBAND ONLY

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DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?

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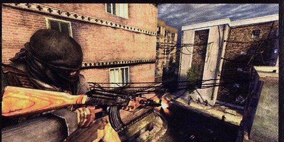

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Blood and Gore
Strong Language
Violence

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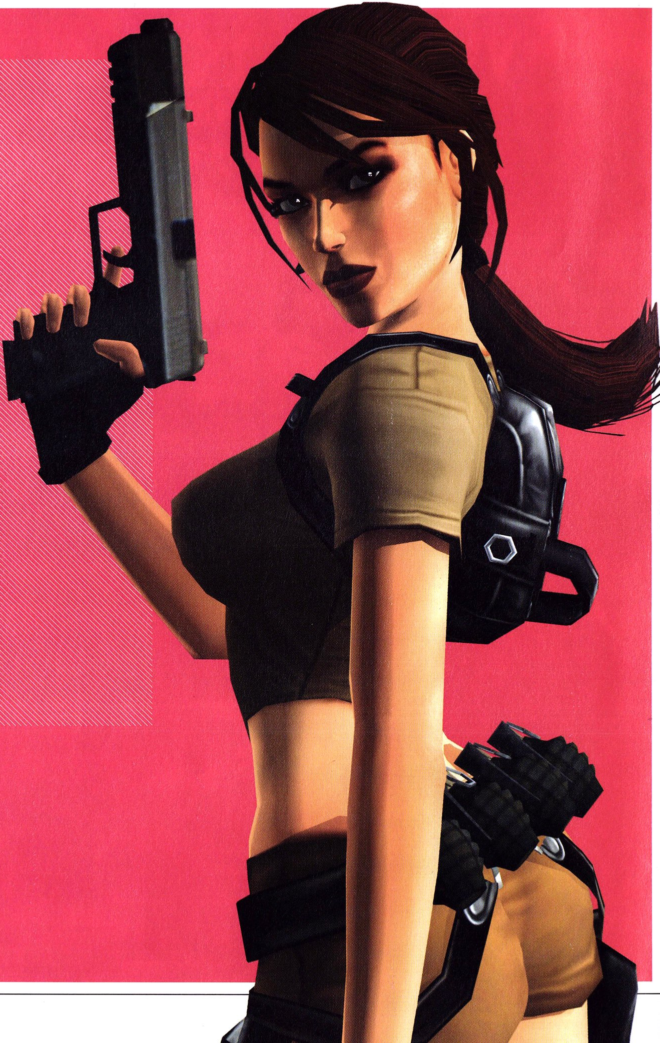
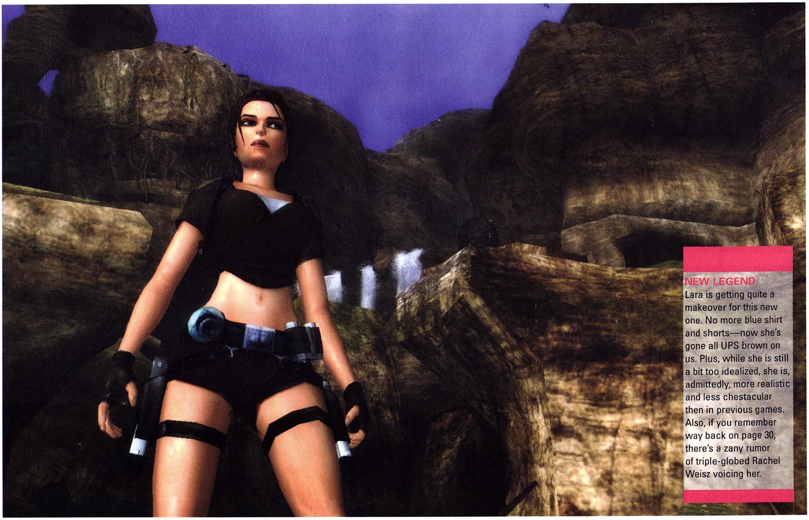
TOMB RAIDER

LEGEND

SHE WEARS SHORT SHORTS

PUB. Eidos DEV. Crystal Dynamics RELEASE April





NEW LEGEND
Lara is getting quite a makeover for this new one. No more blue shirt and shorts—now she's gone all UPS brown on us. Plus, while she is still a bit too idealized, she is, admittedly, more realistic and less chestacular then in previous games. Also, if you remember way back on page 30, there's a zany rumor of triple-globed Rachel Weisz voicing her.

00:00

This is the first chance we've had to sit down with *Tomb Raider: Legend* with a controller in hand, and to be honest, we're nervous. There's no denying that Lara's looking fine these days, but has she really changed? Or will she break our hearts again?

00:01

Hmm, the opening cut-scene is some sort of flashback in which a young Lara is on a plane ride with her mom. But the scene isn't complete yet, and we're really interested in how Lara plays, so we skip it!

00:02

The level opens in some mountains, with Lara standing on a ledge. So far, so good. Move the left analog stick tentatively, and amazingly, Lara responds in a timely manner. This is so encouraging that we get more adventurous. Soon, Lara nimbly runs and jumps along the rocks. Just one moment later, we discover that she's just as nimble when accidentally jumping off the ledge. Fortunately, a recovery option is built in, à la *God of War*'s—hit X quickly enough and Lara manages to avoid falling to her death.

00:05

Diving into a pool of water takes us to the entrance of the first cave. While underwater, we come across the first relic. They can be collected, presumably to unlock extra features, items, art, or what-have-you.

00:07

Time for Pole Swinging 101 (the *Prince of Persia* kind, not the *Showgirls* kind). And yep...sure enough, Lara can swing with the best of them, agilely spinning her way around the cave. Lara and the Prince copy each other so much that they must be destined to be together. Maybe Ubisoft and Eidos can set them up someday....

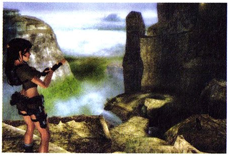
00:10

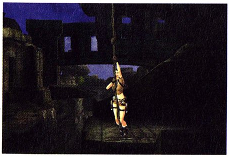
Out of the cave and into a ravine. Lara has her first contact with one of the bad guys, who is, of course, also after the contents of this tomb. He's easily handled, however, by Lara's trusty triggers: L1 to lock on, R1 to shoot. Wham, bam, thank you, ma'am.

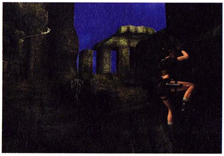
> MOVE THE ANALOG STICK TENTATIVELY, AND AMAZINGLY, LARA RESPONDS IN A TIMELY MANNER.

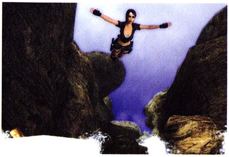
00:13

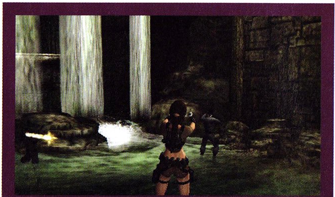
Into a new tomb (or perhaps back into another part of the last one—it's kind of hard to tell without a map option because we have horrible directional sense). In any case, it's time for the first puzzle. This one is pretty basic—get the three stone blocks into place to open up the door at the end of the passage. In this instance, it's a matter of getting two of











TWIN PEEKS

We got to spend time with both the PSP and PS2 versions of the new *Tomb Raider: Legend*, and other than the PSP version's widescreen viewing ratio, not much is different. In fact, the only change we noticed immediately is that the PSP game affords you no control over the camera thanks to the PSP's lack of a right analog stick. Also, some puzzles might be simplified a tiny bit—in the block-on-trigger-spot section, the PSP version had only two stone blocks to place (as opposed to the PS2 version's three). Other than that, the two games are exactly the same. Which is pretty cool, since the game already looks snazzy on the PS2.

the blocks up to a second level. Thanks, however, to the popular lever-as-catapult gaming mechanism, it's a snap.

00:17

After the requisite puzzle, it's time for the requisite obstacle course. Slamming walls of rock are no match for Lara and her trusty block.

00:20

Baxter! This cat, however, is not a very nice one. Somehow cheetahs got into this tomb and are still roaming around, looking to take a nice chomp out of Lara's shapely legs. There might be more than one way to skin a cat, but the most efficient is definitely the Desert Eagle way.

00:22

Lara gets past the puzzles, blocks, and cats, and through a doorway into a long passageway. Anyone who has any experience with videogames knows that innocent-looking passageways are always the most treacherous. And sure enough, the second Lara steps beyond the doors, they slam shut and a cut-scene begins in which the floor starts to crumble away from under Lara's feet. In the *Dragon's Lair/RE4/God of War* tradition, Lara manages to succeed in her scramble to safety as long as we hit the buttons that pop up on the screen quickly enough.

00:23

Let there be light! The passage leads out to a ledge in the sun. And the sun is quickly blocked by a helicopter that's swooping down and shooting away. Lara dashes across a rickety bridge, making it just in time to grab the other side before the chopper's guns demolish the bridge.

> LARA DASHES ACROSS A RICKETY BRIDGE JUST IN TIME TO GRAB THE OTHER SIDE.

00:25

Where there are choppers, there are other bad dudes with guns. After a brisk gun battle, Lara dispatches them, and lo and behold, a fancy-looking medallion is on the ground, with a lever in the center just begging to be pulled. One pull later, and our trip is over.

PlayStation 2
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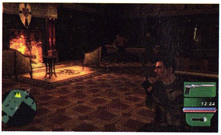
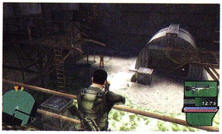
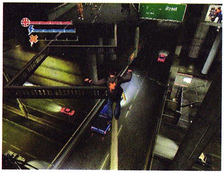






MARC ECKO'S GETTING UP: CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE

GETTING DOWN

PUB. Atari DEV. Collective RELEASE February

00:00

Looks like the first level explains how the main character, Trane, became a graffiti artist. And you can't have an opening sequence without a tutorial!

00:12

Yes, we already know how to punch a guy. You don't have to take us through every single type of move in order for Trane to know that he's supposed to beat the other guy senseless. Well, except for throws—those are kind of tricky to pull off.

00:15

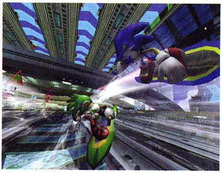
Trane has to do some pretty crazy Spider-Man stuff: climb pipes, walk across walls, and carefully scoot on ledges.

00:17

Hrmm, tagging looks pretty straightforward, though it can be kind of hard to line up your character...particularly when you have rival gang members mashing on your kidneys.

00:18

Whoops, Trane fell. Tagging signs that are up high is a lot harder than you'd think.



SONIC RIDERS

TO THE EXTREME

PUB. Sega DEV. Sonic Team RELEASE February

00:01

We're surprised it took Sega so long to do a futuristic hoverboard game featuring Sonic, because, quite frankly, it doesn't get more extreme than that unless Sonic is also drinking Mountain Dew.

00:02

OK, time to select one of several furry characters. Who the hell are these other guys? Ah, forget it; let's just go with good ol' Sonic.

00:03

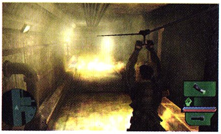
Off we go. The start of the race reminds us of *SSX*—from the future! OK, Sonic is moving forward at very high speeds and it's kind of hard to tell what's going on or exactly what he's supposed to be doing.

00:10

Apparently, Sonic can do tricks while airborne, but you have to land them or face a tumble. Doesn't seem like there's a whole lot to this, but the track design might keep it interesting.

00:12

Hmmmmm....anyone up for happy hour?



SYPHON FILTER: DARK MIRROR

GABE'S 15 MINUTES OF FAME

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Sony CEA RELEASE March

00:00

The scene is Kemsynth Petroleum, a refinery along the Alaskan pipeline. Lian Xing and Gabe Logan attempt a stealth insertion but find the refinery at high alert, swarming with guards.

00:04

As you take control of Gabe, you find that the game handles like a proper third-person shooter, with the analog stick controlling movement and the face buttons controlling aiming. The *Syphon Filter* lock-on system is also fully present.

00:07

After taking out a few guards, Gabe has to protect Lian as she moves in to hack a communication tower. Things get really tough really quickly—but the generous checkpoint system is used well.

00:12

A quickie miniboss battle with Red Jack lets Gabe try out some of his new gadgets. Best of the bunch: exploding darts. Enemies don't even feel them until Gabe triggers the explosion.

00:15

Boom.

THE GODFATHER

REFUSE THIS

PUB. EA DEV. EA Redwood RELEASE Spring

00:00

After seeing his father gunned down in an alley, Giancarlo "GC" Varanini has turned to a life of petty crime. But at the request of his mother, Serafina (this happens during the wedding scene from the film's beginning), Don Corleone intercedes to bring Giancarlo into the Corleone family business and sends Luca Brasi to locate him.

00:05

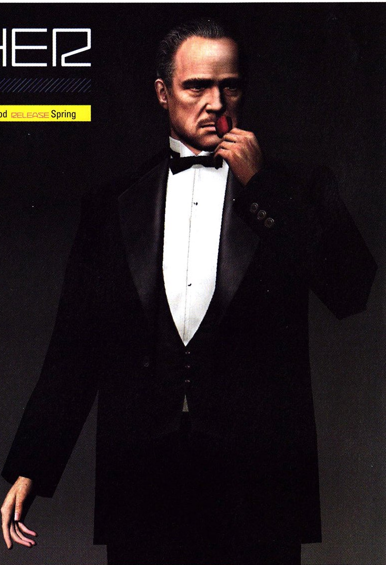
Brasi finally locates GC, just in time to save GC from a vicious beating—or worse—at the hands of his erstwhile business associates. Brasi shows him the ropes, demonstrating *The Godfather*'s complex, somewhat odd combat system.

00:09

After GC gives the young toughs the business, Brasi instructs him to have a little chat with the local butcher—with an overdue protection payment. In order to convince the butcher to do the right thing, it becomes necessary for GC to do a little redecorating. After the accidental breakage of one cash register and two meat cases, the butcher agrees to GC's polite request.

THE TWO ALS

While most of the major actors are in the game, there is a distinct lack of our favorite fellow who uses the "yells a lot" acting technique: Al Pacino. Sure, there's a Michael Corleone in the game, but he has the barest resemblance to good ol' Al (just enough to recognize him). Apparently, Al doesn't believe in games, as he's not in *Scarface*, either.



> AFTER GIANCARLO GIVES THE YOUNG TOUGHS THE BUSINESS...

00:14

Turns out the butcher's got a little money coming in on the side from the casino upstairs. GC convinces the pit boss that he's got a new boss—choking can be persuasive.

00:18

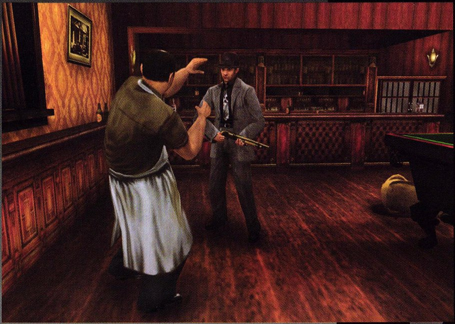
On the way out, GC runs into Officer Friendly, who suggests that a small donation to the Fraternal Order of Police would not be unwelcome. In fact, such a donation can help keep crime down in the neighborhood...or at least unnoticed for a while.

00:23

Later, Brasi invites GC along on his meeting with the Sollozzo family—Brasi has been instructed by the don to infiltrate the Sollozzo. Alas, they murder Brasi, just like in the movie. Except in the game, GC witnesses the assassination through a window. He busts in to seek revenge, but it's too late.

00:30

In a panic, GC hunts down Marty "Monk" Malone...just in time to see Monk brutally shot in a barber shop—along with the don himself (and the useless Fredo Corleone). Now he has to follow the ambulance to the hospital. Trouble is, the rival families want to even the score, so a Sunday drive this ain't. Will he make it? That's up to you.



GET YOUR MOB FACE ON

How is it that our own Giancarlo has gotten so wrapped up in a life of crime? Through the magic of *The Godfather*'s "mob face" system, which puts a mafioso spin on the unbelievably in-depth character-creation tool first seen in EA Sports' *Tiger Woods* games.

HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

AUTOMATIC
CALIBER .45
CUSTOM SLIDE
EL MONTE, CA.

LESS BLOOD = MORE MONEY

PUB. **Eidos** DEV. **IO Ent.** RELEASE **Spring**

Agent 47 is bald, back, and better than ever. For one thing, the game now has pop-up windows that let you see events that give you clues as to what your next task is, instead of displaying a sentence that explains the objective. It's a cool-looking tactic, giving the game a *24*-like vibe.

You can still choose to play the game however you prefer, but there are even more bonuses if you play sneakily and leave as few bodies as possible, and enhanced gameplay features will make that easier to achieve. One option is to use the improved techniques to make your murders look accidental. In one level set in a rehab clinic, 47 can rig a resident's hot plate so that it explodes and kills the target when he stirs his pasta sauce. Another target asks you to spot him while he's bench-pressing, helpfully setting you up to drop the barbell on his throat and leave him looking like the victim of his own weak biceps. Sometimes, 47 can walk up behind an unsuspecting victim who is stargazing and casually push him over a railing.

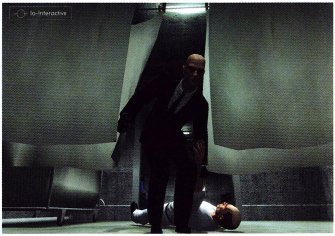
> RIG A HOT PLATE TO EXPLODE AND KILL THE TARGET WHILE HE'S STIRRING HIS PASTA SAUCE.

The game will also have more receptacles around for you to stash bodies in, meaning you'll be doing a bit less dragging of bodies to closets or empty rooms. We were able to dump a nosy jogger down a convenient manhole, and the clown we anesthetized fit very nicely in the back of his crazy clown van.

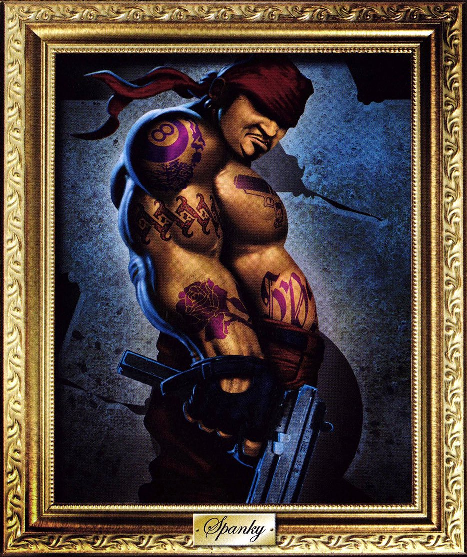
You might like to take people on with your guns blazing, but you'll get less money. The skillfulness of your performance dictates how much you make. Become too notorious, and you'll end up spending your reward money on new identities instead of new guns.

HEAL THYSELF WITH RAGE
If you get caught in a gunfight and find yourself low on health, don't worry. Sharpshooters will still have a chance to escape with their life: Anyone who, at the point of death, can pull off three successful head shots in a row will recover some health points.

Io-Interactive



FREEDOM'S ROLE MODEL RETURNS



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PLAY MULTIPLE CHARACTERS WITH SPECIAL SKILLS

STATE OF EMERGENCY 2

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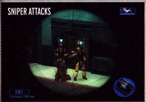
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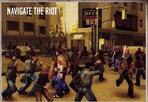
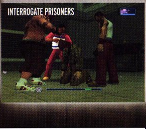
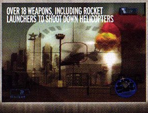

NAVIGATE THE RIOT


INTERROGATE PRISONERS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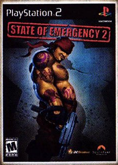

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BEST SELLING GAME
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Intense Violence
Strong Language
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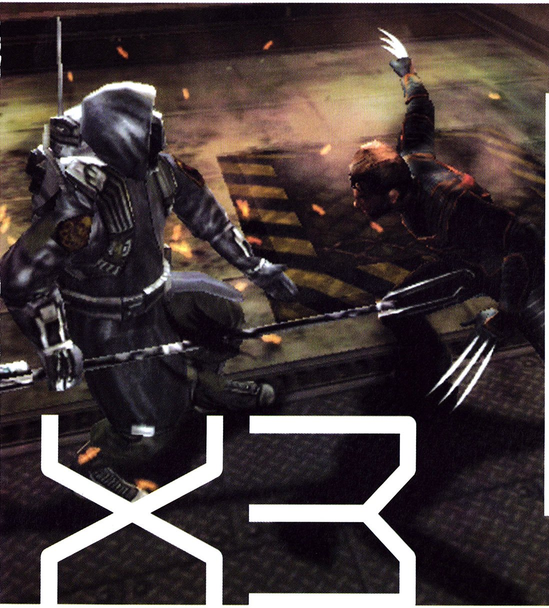
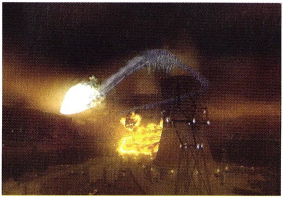




X3

THE POWER OF 3

PUB. Activision DEV. Z-Axis RELEASE Spring

Fans of the *X-Men* series are in a tizzy about reported changes that director Brett Ratner made to *X3* after original director Bryan Singer's departure, and a recent film trailer has only increased the questions. Do Professor X and Cyclops really die? Which mutants will be "cured"? How big of a role does Jean Grey/Phoenix have? And why is the Golden Gate Bridge falling to pieces? Well, don't look to the *X3* game to answer any of those questions for you. Rather than paralleling the movie's plot, this game, which features three playable characters, will actually bridge the time period between the *X2* and *X3* films.

NIGHTCRAWLER

In the level we saw, Nightcrawler is in an industrial reactor–type area. Working with Colossus (who will have a larger role in the third film), he uses his teleportation skill to get past the enemies. Every character's basic abilities will be available from the beginning of the game, although the development team is working on mutant evolutions, which allow you to power up these skills. While you can use Nightcrawler to do occasional melee fighting, he's a lot more effective if you use his ability to "BAMF" ("teleport" for you non-X-Men-nerds out there) from side to side, confusing enemies long enough to get in some good hits before "BAMFing" again to another area. By the end of the game, you'll also learn why Nightcrawler is not present in the third film.

WOLVERINE

As expected, Wolverine is, well, the best at what he does: using brute strength to defeat challengers. Environments will be tailored to play to each character's strengths; in Wolverine's case, this means you'll be dealing with groups of enemies in fairly wide-open environments, like the feudal Japanese temple courtyard we saw. Though his character doesn't have any sexy cool moves, he will have a rage meter that fills up as he fights. Once it tops off, he can go into Fury mode, which allows him to kick extreme ass instead of just regular ass.

> THE GAME WILL BRIDGE THE TIME PERIOD BETWEEN THE X2 AND X3 FILMS.

ICEMAN

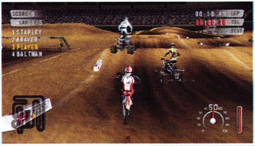
Remember how Iceman zipped around on his ice sled in *Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends*? Well, now that he's playable in *X3*, you can slip 'n' slide all you want. The developers modeled Iceman after Tony Hawk—his sled resembles a skateboard/snowboard hybrid, and you'll use it to weave around the large, open levels. Iceman will also have a special attack known as the plow, which works how you might think: It puts a big ice shield in front of him that can slam into opponents.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH...

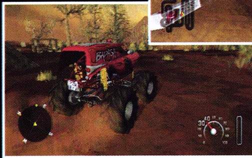
X3: Reunion, a space simulation game that came out for the PC last November. Made by European developer Egosoft, it is a sequel to *X2: The Threat* and is set in the X universe, which is being threatened by an alien race.

DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME.

To those parties attempting to recreate the stunts contained in the new MX vs. ATV: On The Edge we offer this message: DON'T. While that seems fairly obvious to most, you'd be surprised how many people will contemplate emulating its dangerous intensity, vis-á-vis the realistic head-to-head racing experience. Ergo, THQ and Rainbow Studios put forth the following caveats to all parties: Do not attempt to make a golf cart do 70 mph, nor launch a sand rail over a moving plane. Moreover, do not undertake the recreation of any and all stunts from MX vs. ATV: On The Edge in order to replicate its realistic rag-doll physics. The insane stunts and fierce racing is intended for the sole intent and purpose of an intense gaming experience, not for the discovery of clever ways to inflict bodily harm. Case in point, THQ and Rainbow Studios offer this photo as reference of the projected outcome of ignoring this warning. Honestly, what was this guy thinking? Said driver wasn't anywhere close to successfully completing the jump, nor is the other side of the canyon he was attempting to reach even in the aforementioned photo. In summation, MX vs. ATV: On The Edge is not real, don't attempt to make it real.

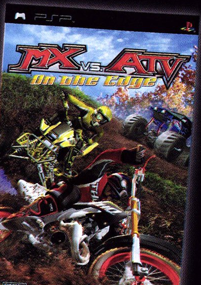


Choose any vehicle and unleash it in 4 player Wireless Ad-Hoc.



New ATV models, redesigned monster trucks and new pimped out 4x4 golf karts.

Rugged new outdoor environments.



EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Mild Lyrics

PSP
PlayStation Portable

rainbow
STUDIOS

THQ
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METAL GEAR SOLID 3 SUBSISTENCE

Pub. Konami **Dev.** Kojima Productions **Release** March

Just another month to go before we can experience this packed rerelease of one of the best games in the PS2 library. We've covered the single-player camera changes pretty extensively, and Kojima Productions is too busy finishing the game for us Americans to show us more of the extra stuff. So to tide you over, here's a neat shot of Snake doing what he does best: being sneaky. Also, try to figure out what new camouflage he's wearing!

WTF?

Kojima is full of wackiness and humor, as evidenced by this bizarre alteration to a key cut-scene.

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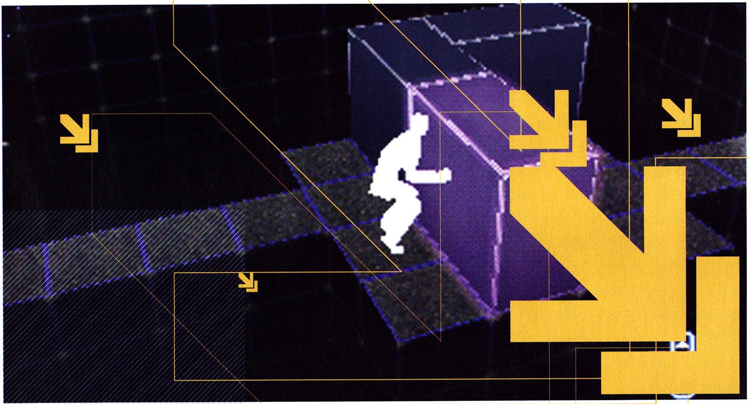

REVIEWS

MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE, ONE GAME AT A TIME

96

PQ

THE PSP'S NEXT GREAT PUZZLER

OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

GAME OF THE MONTH

RATING KEY

No more blargs, octagons, or whatever you've called them—now we're sticking with straight-up numbers. And any game that receives five of 'em is something truly special that deserves a spot in your collection. On the other hand, a 2.5 is merely mediocre. And a 0.5? Well…at least they're fun to rip apart.

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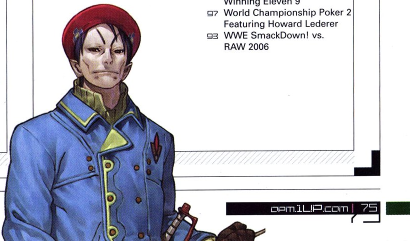


BLACK

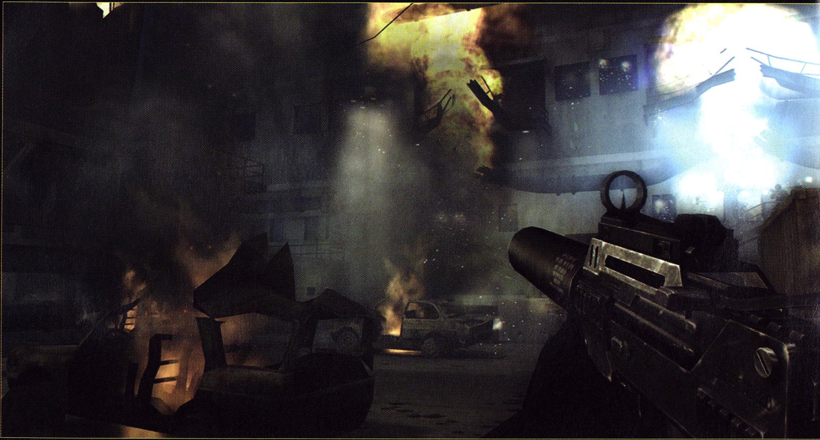
MONEY SHOT

PUB. EA DEV. Criterion ESRB E MSRP $39.99

If you asked me to describe the one thing I learned after playing *Black*, it's not that guns are loud, or that rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) sound scary, or that an M249 can unload its person-tearing load of 150 5.56-by-45mm bullets in less than 20 seconds. I already knew that stuff.

What I didn't know is just how freakin' cool it is to use a shotgun to blow open a door. I'm quite tempted to purchase one as my new "skeleton key," and I'm of the mind to now dock any future game that does *not* let me use a shotgun to knock a door down.

This simple "shotgun equals great door opener" formula is only a small example of *Black*'s loving portrayal of guns. The front-end menu is simply a montage of firing guns and shell casings being ejected from said guns. When you reload your gun during the game, your character is so focused on just the weapon that the rest of the screen undergoes a weird blur effect, which is actually quite disorienting at first. There is a minimal story that involves traitors, terrorists, and black-ops missions in Eastern Europe, but you'll quickly forget names and faces—yet you'll always remember the look, sound, and feel of a G36C or an AK-47 or a Magnum.



THE THUNDER OF HIS GUNS

For the longest time, home-theater geeks would use the Omaha Beach scene in *Saving Private Ryan* both as a test of a home theater's visual and sound quality, and as a demonstration of said theater's supposed awesomeness. The chaotic cinematography is a good diagnostic for how cool the TV looks, and paying attention to the snap-whiz-crackle-pop-thud sounds of the various guns and bodies going from the left-front speaker to the back right of the setup is a great way to find out if your speakers were worth the two grand.

In that vein, *Black* is pretty much the best videogame for testing and showing off your home theater. The whole game contains numerous set pieces filled with the most sound and fury a game can muster from the PS2. The visual presentation is top-notch; your bullets don't simply enter guys and damage them—they bounce off walls, they cause sparks that resemble miniature fireworks when they strike metallic surfaces, and they kick up all sorts of debris depending on what they hit. Unloading an assault rifle into a small room quickly generates enough dust as to require you to cease fire for a moment just to let the air clear. A particularly harrowing sequence in a minefield fills the screen with fire, dirt, grime, and flying bodies. Hitting a guy up high in a building with an RPG results in a minor shockwave that shatters most of the windows around him, usually causing large chunks of the building to fall down as a result. There is no such thing as a small explosion, as each one tends to fill your screen with so much fire and thunder and fury that it feels downright biblical (to be precise, like a modern reinterpretation of the Old Testament). The RPG is followed by a smoke contrail that rivals the smoke effects in *Call of Duty 2* on the Xbox 360. Additionally, among the various missions, one takes place in collapsible, debris-filled environments, another in a large forest at night, and yet another in a moody insane asylum—and all are filled with impressive effects. *Black* is the first game since *Metal Gear Solid 3* that nearly makes "next-generation" graphics irrelevant.

> EXPLOSIONS FILL THE SCREEN WITH SO MUCH FIRE AND THUNDER AND FURY AS TO FEEL BIBLICAL....

SNAP CRACKLE POP BANG DEAD

As great as the visuals are, particular kudos should go to the game's audio team, as *Black* has quite possibly the best sound design of any shooter to date. Most gamemakers seem to forget that the PS2 can do Dolby Pro Logic II (a method of generating 5.1 surround sound), and those that do remember tend to just put random noise in the rear speakers. *Black* uses the other speakers to indicate positions of baddies, grenades, and bullets whizzing from place to place. Playing *Black* with normal TV stereo versus a proper home-theater setup offers a

NICE RACK

While *Black* includes a whole lot of guns waiting to be picked up and squeezed, here are six that both the development team and Team *OPM* particularly liked.

MOST POPULAR

Due to its legendary reliability and ruggedness (it never jams and it's easy to clean) and its low manufacturing cost, the AK-47 is basically the most oft-used gun in the world. It's also really easy to train with, compared to other, more recent guns. You'll never run out of AK ammo in the game.

COMPACT URBAN

This is a popular street gun because it's so small. However, it also spits out bullets really, really, really fast. For example, if you catch yourself standing right next to a dude looking to deliver the bullet business to you, you can unload a whole mag from the MAC-10 to stop him.

LUCKY FEELING

The Magnum is rare (our initial playthrough only uncovered three in the whole game), but man alive, it packs a wallop. It can take out most enemies with a single hit, but it has a very narrow cone of damage, meaning you pretty much have to aim dead center and hope your target doesn't move out of the way.

COMMANDO'S CHOICE

The MP5, designed by Heckler & Koch in Germany, is perhaps the most popular submachine gun in the special-forces community. The West German police and border guard used it, and their special forces, the GSG-9, introduced it to their special-forces buddies. It's also had many starring roles in movies.

SKY STREAKER

You know that scary sound that resembles a combination of a whizzing and a streaking noise? The RPG tears through the air so fast that it generates a vacuum behind it, and that crazy noise is the sound of the surrounding air rushing in to fill the vacuum.

ISRAELI MIGHT

Probably the most identifiable submachine gun in pop culture (the MAC-10 is often mistaken for the Uzi by people who don't know guns), the Uzi is a good, solid, compact little bullet-spewing gun. The *Black* team cites *The Terminator* as the major influence for putting the Uzi into the game.

ALEX WARD
ON ACCESSIBILITY

OPM You've talked about how you wanted to make *Black* a very accessible game—more accessible than the standard FPS. What's the thinking behind that?

AW Our feeling now is that the big sin most developers make is making the game too damn hard. As hardcore gamers, we all know about this genre, but the FPS has not reached out into the mainstream. But we believe that if you've paid your money, we want you to complete our software. You want as many people as possible to play your game. There's a lot of great stuff in FPSes, and the majority of players don't get to see it.

We play a lot of games, we own lots of different systems, and we devote a large amount of our time to playing games. What we have to accept as the market gets bigger and the audience gets larger is that not everyone does that. My brother-in-law played through *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, and I said to him, "Yeah, I kind of thought it was too short." And he said, "What? I thought the game was too long! I spent six hours [on it]!" To him that was a big thing.

Absolutely, it would be great for *Black* to reach out to a bigger audience than before. But that's a really tough thing to say, because in saying that, I know there are hardcore players who'll say, "Right, I'm not buying that game, then. Because it's made for newbies! And lamers! And it's all easy!" What we want is for this game to be a fun shooting game—shooting and explosions. It's visceral and exciting and it should be enjoyed by everybody. We all enjoy action movies; that's why we made this game, to celebrate our love of action movies.

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PlayStation®2

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
Use of Alcohol

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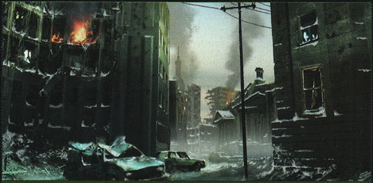
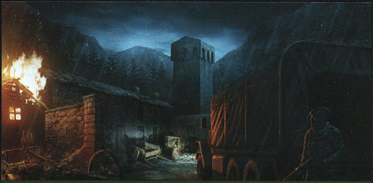
LET'S GO TO THE MOVIES

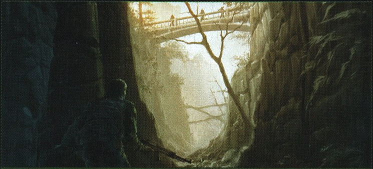
If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then a lot of directors and actors and producers should feel flattered right now. Below are the movies that influenced the design of *Black*'s levels.



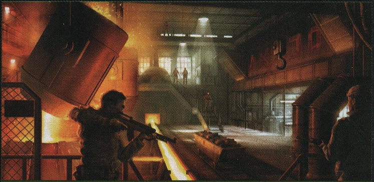
LEVEL 1: CITY STREETS
Black Hawk Down, Heat



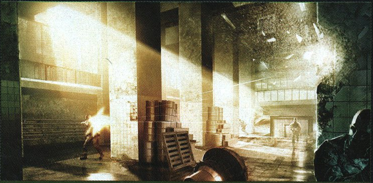
LEVEL 2: WILDERNESS
Behind Enemy Lines, Predator



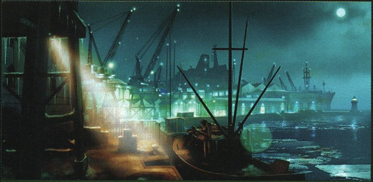
LEVEL 3: GRAVEYARD/TOWN
PART 1: Based on a clip from a BBC documentary about the conflict in Chechnya
PART 2: *Black Hawk Down*



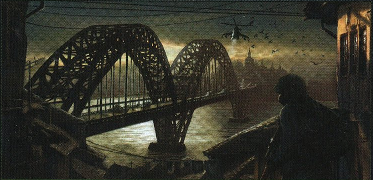
LEVEL 4: STEELWORKS
Behind Enemy Lines, RoboCop, Terminator 2: Judgment Day, Navy SEALs



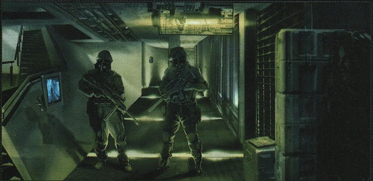
LEVEL 5: ASYLUM
Blade Runner, The Matrix, The Rock



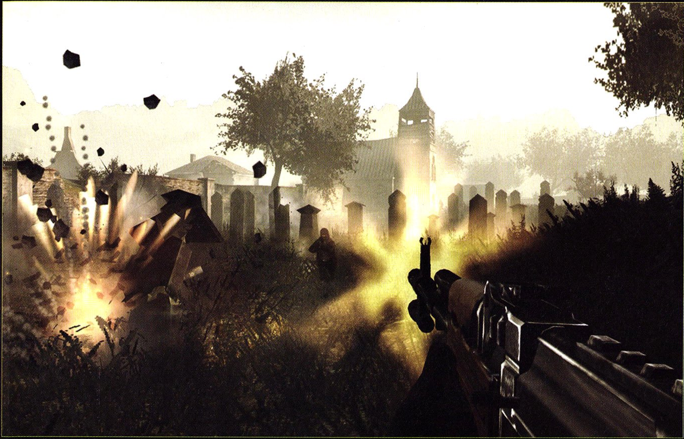
LEVEL 6: DOCKS
Eraser, The Usual Suspects, The World Is Not Enough, True Lies, The Rock



LEVEL 7: CITY BRIDGE
Escape From New York, Star Wars: A New Hope



LEVEL 8: GULAG
24, Three Kings, Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines



significant enough difference to almost make me proclaim that you need a surround-sound setup to enjoy the game. While the distinct sound of an RPG streaking its way through the air is pretty cool, it's positively bladder-bursting when the sound tears from one speaker to another as you see the shot fly by. Regular gunfire is crisp and loud, and the aforementioned explosions will give your subwoofer a workout.

In fact, the amazing combination of sight and sound makes *Black* one of the most cinematic games on the market. Despite it having a nearly inconsequential and terse story line, the audiovisual experience is something that begs to be witnessed. Just as how Criterion tapped into the part of our brain that causes us to rubberneck at car accidents with its *Burnout* franchise, so has it managed to tap into whatever gland tells our brain, "Movie-style gunfights are fun to watch." Again, *Black* is an apt test for a cool gaming setup simply because it catches the eyes and ears of anyone walking by. Everyone at the *OPM* office ended up being entranced for a few minutes of watching me destroy most everything.

A lot has been written about *Black*'s presentation and production values, and that's simply because it currently has no peer on the PS2. When it comes to the actual game, it's almost painful to notice some of the things that could have been tuned a bit better. Granted, it has quite a few awesome little tweaks and gameplay features that help make the overall experience very cool. The two-weapon limit forces you to be a bit tactical in deciding which guns to keep. The ability to destroy most cover (not everything is destructible, but in general, the things you expect to blow up do so in appropriate fire-and-brimstone fashion) adds a fair bit of tension to a firefight, and despite the game's excessive balls-to-the-wall presentation, it's actually better to be slower and more thoughtful in your approach rather than employ a straight-up run-n-gun method.

GUN JAM

Starting off, the AI feels pretty good, but it could have used another level of polish, and it doesn't change much between difficulty levels. While enemies will both use cover and try to destroy your cover, not to mention coordinate their attacks, they still fall victim to some old tricks—you can shoot them from afar with an AK-47, and they won't really react to you. The occasional friendly AI is barely serviceable—it's a bit of a miracle when your AI buddies kill someone (then again, that might be on purpose). Also, it's a bit annoying to see how much damage a baddie can soak up before dying—especially shotgun-toting enemies, who basically can still walk and shoot despite getting nearly a full magazine of ammo unloaded into their faces. And while I don't

> THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS MAKE BLACK ONE OF THE MOST CINEMATIC GAMES ON THE MARKET....

ALEX WARD
ON MULTIPLAYER

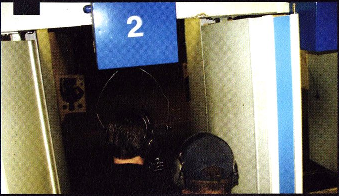
OPM Why aren't you doing multiplayer in *Black*?

AW Well, where do we start? It's a bit like, "Where's your PC version?"

OPM Multiplayer is one of those things that is somewhat expected in an FPS.

AW Expected by who? Multiplayer has evolved so much. Multiplayer is either *Mario Kart* or *GoldenEye* on the N64, PC over a LAN, two-player splitscreen.... Could we have done some kind of splitscreen? Yeah. But how many people want to do it? I like to play full screen. I always thought we'd want to do something special and unique with it. We're innovating here in terms of action; we're innovating in terms of what the guns can do, in terms of how you interact with the world. We wouldn't want to tackle multiplayer online gaming until we had spent a lot of time working out something unique to do.

I'm not interested in deathmatch; a lot of members of my team aren't [either]. I guess if we did anything we'd try to do something more elegant. Some PC paradigms have dominated the industry for a long time; sometimes they've done a network experience and no single player. We wanted to focus completely on making a solid single-player game. We've seen other developers do a lot of things and screw a lot of it up, but this is our first FPS and we wanted to get the controls right, we wanted to get AI right, and we wanted to get the experience right.



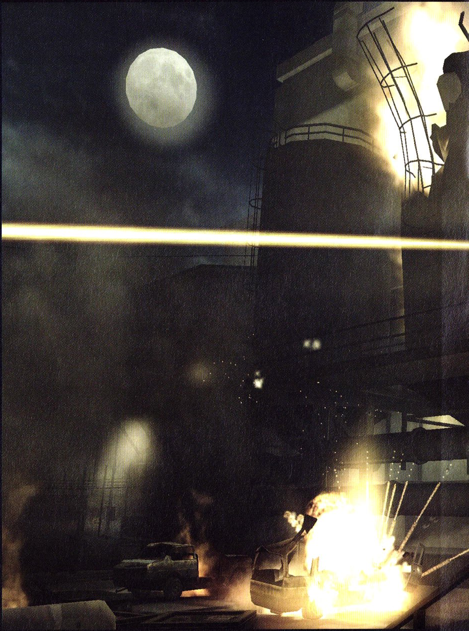
HOME ON THE RANGE

SHOOTING UP WITH ALEX WARD

Even with the neon-lit excesses of Vegas all around, an excursion to the legendary Gun Store with Alex Ward had no problem standing out. He chaperoned a group of journalists to the source of his inspiration for *Black* much like Willy Wonka would lead a trip to Baskin-Robbins. Inside, we gazed into cases filled with a different sort of 31 flavors. Handguns, assault rifles, submachine guns, and shotguns waited for us to tell the nice man behind the counter, "I'll take that one."

No sooner had I gotten those words out than I was whisked away to don my ear and eye protection and enter the range. Before I knew it, I stood there, alone in my lane, isolated in the silence of the headphones with a Ruger .45 in hand as I stared down the range. As I started to squeeze the trigger, I wondered what exactly was going to happen, and then, without warning, the world exploded and I had my answer.

Copies are never as good as the original, and firing a real gun erases any notion that a videogame could somehow serve as training for it. Not only is it a visceral experience, but each gun has its own distinct personality. Just keeping the AK-47 on target as it violently kicked was a handful. Hunched in a more compact grip, the MP5 was a degree more controllable for me, but it was still plenty eager to jump around. Sighting down the long barrel of an M16, I put the first round accurately on the mark, and then I held on as it lurched up and to the right. And for raw power, nothing quite matched the adrenaline rush of rapid-firing the semiauto SPAS 12-gauge. | *Garnett Lee*



mind the lack of a jump button, the slow movement speed makes the lack of a sprint function even more prominent.

Interestingly enough, one thing that will annoy hardcore FPS players is something that Criterion fully admits to (see page 79): The game is short. After finishing the game on normal difficulty, my game clock read 6:53—and I'm pretty sure that seven hours includes the time I found a safe room and went into an hour-long staff meeting. On average, I went through a mission on normal difficulty in 20 to 30 minutes, with the last one taking me about an hour to complete (*Black* has eight missions total). Also, if you actually do pay attention to the story, then the ending of the last mission is a blatant and annoying tease for a follow-up. I wouldn't say it's as bad as *Halo 2*'s abrupt single-player ending, but I will admit that, based on the cut-scene at the end, I was fully expecting another mission or two to follow, only to be surprised by the sight of the end credits. Also, while multiplayer isn't necessarily needed in this game, it's almost painful to think that there isn't any, simply because the prospect of conducting an intense firefight in an abandoned bathroom with live people is not possible.

> ONE THING THAT WILL ANNOY HARDCORE FPS FANS IS SOMETHING CRITERION FULLY ADMITS TO....

ONCE YOU GO BLACK...

CAN A NONFAN OF SHOOTERS BE CONVERTED?

When we first heard about *Black*, the developers told us that they wanted this game to be a shooter for everybody, much in the same way that *Burnout* (which was created by the same studio) is a racing game that appeals to a wide cross section of people.

Not being a shooter fan put me in the prime position of being able to evaluate whether they succeeded. So I gamely holstered up my shotgun (though I'm not sure whether you even *can* holster a shotgun) and dove in. And it was fun. The accessibility made things a lot easier: Even though I'd have a hard time differentiating between an RPG and a pistol in reality, I quickly figured out which weapons worked best where. And the satisfaction of hurling a grenade through a window and then watching the glass shatter all around is pretty amazing.

But the ease of use and the decent pacing don't change the fact that I have absolutely wretched aim, severely handicapping my ability to really immerse myself in any gun-driven game. *Burnout* differed for me because I know how to drive, so those skills are already second nature, and I find driving fast fun. But I've never shot a gun in my life, and while the concept has a sort of novelty appeal, it's not something that I feel compelled to do over and over.

So...*Black* is good, and I like playing it, but it's not something that'll keep me up nights like *Burnout* did. But to be fair, I don't know if there's any shooter that could. | *Dana Jongewaard*

REPEAT MEMBER OF THE GUN CLUB

One thing that gives the game some added replayability is being able to unlock weapons with unlimited ammo—which doesn't make much of a difference for most of the guns, since there is so much ammo. But it does make rare items like the RPG, the M203 grenade launcher, or the Magnum even more satisfying to use. Finishing the game on hard difficulty gives you a slick M16 with grenade attachment (also with unlimited ammo), which just might be the most cathartic weapon in PS2 history.

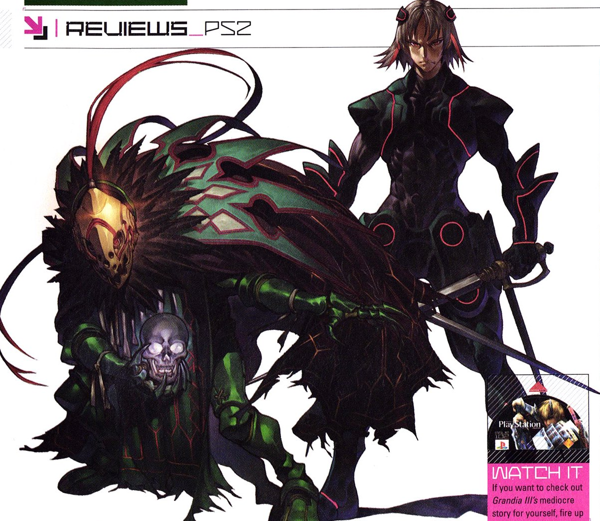
But that's about it for replayability. Sure, there are multiple difficulty levels, but those mostly change the amount of available health packs—you can store up to three health packs at a time and just press Down on the D-pad to use them, as opposed to the first-aid kits that heal you immediately after you walk over them. Hard difficulty basically means there are no health packs, just first-aid kits, so you can't "save up" your heals. The changes to the AI aren't very drastic—it's not like how *Halo* almost feels like a different game once you change difficulty levels.

PULL THE TRIGGER

Criterion has succeeded in completely immersing the player in intense, cinematic gunplay—no other shooter has captured the pure awesomeness and adrenaline of a suspenseful shoot-out in a game quite like this. It's a bit of a shame that the core game itself is merely solid. The perfect feel and presentation make the gameplay flaws stand out even more, but on the other hand, those same flaws would have doomed most other games, while *Black* is saved by its most excellent presentation. The paper-thin story and the less-polished gameplay aspects combine with the excessive yet satisfying core action to make *Black* "gun porn" in the truest sense of the phrase. | *Thierry Nguyen*

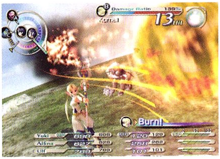
VERDICT It's gun porn. You want awesome shooting action? Nothing better here. You want more than that? You might be disappointed.

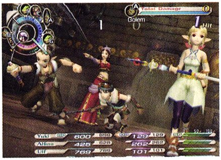
SCORE 4.5

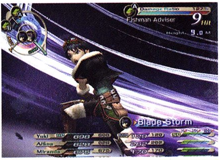


THIS BADASS WITH THE SPOOKY MASK IS LAWLIM. NOT ONLY DOES HE LOOK COOL, BUT HE HAS AN UNDEAD DRAGON AS A PET. YIKES!

WATCH IT
If you want to check out *Grandia III's* mediocre story for yourself, fire up the video on this month's demo disc.







PUB. Square Enix DEV. Game Arts ESRB T MSRP $49.99

GRANDIA III
THE GRANDEST BATTLE WITH THE DULLEST STORY

The *Grandia* franchise was dangerously close to jumping the shark once *Grandia Xtreme* was released, but thankfully, *Grandia III* features no hipsters or punks—just lush graphics, numerous dungeons, a unique combat system, and a story to justify all the monster killing—the hallmarks of any RPG.

Unfortunately, while the story starts out pretty spiffily, it soon devolves into a typical happy-teen-on-a-fantasy-romp cliché. Both the box cover and the beginning give off a slick "sky pirates" vibe, with design sensibilities that echo *Tale Spin*, *Last Exile*, and even *Skies of Arcadia*. The story begins with pilot wannabe Yuki performing a test flight on his newest plane and seeing a mysterious girl being chased down below. He and his mom, Miranda (perhaps the best character here and quite possibly the coolest mom in gaming), rescue the girl, Alfina, and then go off on a grand quest. Your gang runs into a cool sailor named Alonso, which helps maintain the whole "sailing and flying" vibe. Then, at a certain point, Miranda and Alonso leave, and the game becomes a pretty cliché "two young kids battle peril across the land" type of adventure. I kid you not; you actually go to a fire temple, a wind temple, and so forth. Once the story became uninteresting, I basically stopped paying attention to anything people said and just watched the cut-scenes because they looked pretty, then got back into more battles. The two things RPG players tend to care about are the story and the fighting, and while the story is pretty mediocre, the combat makes up for it.

The battle system is, in three words, still pretty awesome. It's carried over from previous games, and it adds some nice tweaks without subtracting from the rest of the combat. It's turn based in the sense that you have to wait for your turn to issue commands, but everything actually happens in real time. Combat strategies include interrupting enemy attacks, using the right spells and skills, setting up air combos (during which one character knocks a baddie into the air and other characters can pull off special attacks for extra damage), and deciding whether or not to listen to a party member's suggestion. The combat system is so interesting that I didn't mind leveling a lot, simply because that meant I was fighting a lot.

> THE COMBAT SYSTEM IS SO INTERESTING THAT I DIDN'T MIND LEVELING A LOT.

Grandia III is a game filled with polish, slick visuals, and a fantastic battle system. It just happens to be bogged down by a fairly mediocre story. Those who want to weep during their games will probably end up rolling their eyes instead, but if you ignore the story and focus instead on the lush spectacle of slaying things, you'll no doubt have a grand old time. | *Thierry Nguyen*

VERDICT Play it to kill things real prettylike, not for the story.

SCORE 4|5

NO MORE KIDS!
I'm no marketing dude, but I know that a lot of RPG players are growing up, and the whole "teenage heroes zipping around" type of story is starting to get tiresome. More games should have characters in their 20s or, gasp, their 30s!

UNKNOWN
200 M

MS SAGA: A NEW DAWN

A NEW HOPE FOR GUNDAM GAMING

PUB. Bandai DEV. Bandai ESRB E10+ MSRP TBA

***Gundam* games** have never been anything special. Despite a few flashes of brilliance, they've always been the sort of thing that only hardcore *Gundam* fans will bother with, since the rest of us end up feeling too uninformed to know or care what's happening.

MS Saga is basically a game built around fixing that problem. Here you won't find familiarity with the series' decades-long history a prerequisite for understanding and enjoyment. Sure, *A New Dawn* still does a lot of fan service, what with the classic mecha and various "wink, wink" references to older stories, but the whole idea of being in a world where the past has literally been wiped out means that *Gundam* newcomers won't get left behind before they even start.

MS Saga is a traditional RPG in every sense of the word. Your party of giant robots travels the earth looking for new towns, harassing villagers for information and goods, completing quests, raiding dungeons, and getting into all sorts of random, turn-based battles with roaming beasties and enemy Mobile Suits.

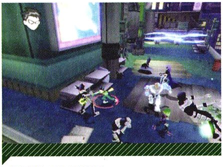
Character customization is quite extensive, too, since besides acquiring completely new Mobile Suits for our heroes along the way, you can pretty much swap out any part on your mech, resulting in hundreds of unique combinations and letting you specialize in distance attacks or up-close-and-personal hand-to-hand combat.

It's too bad the extensive customization and *Final Fantasy X*–esque character swapping don't really come into play anywhere but during boss battles. Between these challenging encounters, you'll travel many miles of boring landscapes and uninspired dungeons, and you'll fight in battle after tedious battle against brainless cannon fodder.

MS Saga succeeds in creating one of the first truly accessible *Gundam* experiences while still giving the hardcore fans a reason to play. It just doesn't manage to sidestep the standard RPG pitfalls. It's not engaging enough to make the dozens and dozens of extra fights and mindless villagers interesting at all. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT A solid RPG featuring more robot customization than you'll know what to do with. Too bad it gets so boring in parts.

SCORE 3|5



TEEN TITANS

OUT PAST ITS CURFEW

PUB. Majesco DEV. A2M ESRB E10+ MSRP $39.99

***Teen Titans* is one** of the numerous games that exist simply as part of a natural cycle. It started as a comic book (which itself is a spin-off—the Teen Titans are comprised of junior sidekicks of established superheroes). It then expanded into a decent cartoon. Invariably, the toys and kids' meals came. And, right on cue, the videogame popped onto the scene (first on the GBA and now on current-gen platforms).

The game is pretty much as straightforward as the number at the end of this review indicates. Think about what you'd expect from a standard beat-em-up with five characters. Yes, these characters have different attributes and abilities (Robin is well-rounded, Cyborg is quite strong, etc.). Yes, you can switch between all five characters; whomever you're not controlling directly can be controlled by either the AI or a fellow gamer (or three) via the Multitap. Yes, there is a pretty simplistic combat system (Square for light attack, Triangle for heavy, Circle for ranged, X for jump).

And hey, guess what, on top of those just-as-expected features and mechanics, there are a few hitches that come with the territory. The simplicity of the combat is as much a deterrent as it is a useful feature, for example, making the game just too easy. And the camera, at times, has trouble keeping all the Titans onscreen at once. Consequently, when all the heroes and baddies *are* onscreen, it's a bit difficult to focus on whomever you're controlling at the time.

Fans of the show will probably appreciate the use of authentic voice talent and the numerous references to the show and in-jokes (à la the Master of Games mode, the many villains who drop into the game—such as the H.I.V.E. Five—and the collectible Larry the Titan tokens). Those who have no emotional investment in a ragtag team of junior superheroes will just find yet another simple beat-em-up. | *Thierry Nguyen*

VERDICT A cartoon-based beat-em-up, what're you expecting?

SCORE 2.5|5

WHO'RE WE ROBBING?

A popular question about the show is which of the three Robins is in it: the original, Dick Grayson; his follow-up, Jason Todd; or the current Robin, Tim Drake? There have been many clues that point to any and all three Robins, but the combination of discipline, training, and the constant need to prove himself makes us think he's Dick Grayson.

PlayStation
ISSUE 102

PLAY IT

Looking for another fix of *Teen Titans* now that the series has come to an end? Play the demo on this month's disc.

Demon Fist
Baso Eros
3 Hits
Damage 107
Bonus 1
CLIMAX

If the characters look vaguely familiar to you, perhaps you've seen Shinichiro Watanabe's *Samurai Champloo*. Character designer Kazuto Nakazawa was tapped by Namco to handle *Legendia*'s cast.

TALES OF LEGENDIA

THE ACTION MAN'S RPG

PUB. Namco DEV. Namco
ESRB T MSRP $49.99

***Tales of Legendia* has an immediacy** that other RPGs lack. It doesn't waste time explaining what's going on: You don't get a huge info dump of backstory at the beginning of the game, because the writers are smart enough not to have characters spout things they already know at one another. Instead, you discover things as they happen, which gives the proceedings a lean and welcome pace. The team also left plenty of room for strangeness and whimsy, such as the town enforcers who break into song before roughing you up.

Enemy encounters share that immediacy. As in other *Tales* games, the linear motion battle system is in effect here, and as usual, battles play out like those in a fighting or action game—you have the ability to move freely about the 2D battlefield, and certain attacks and spells are mapped to buttons—but they're faster and a little more frantic than those in the PS1 *Tales* games. As with the story, the way the game simply throws you into battles—leaving you to work out the finer points yourself—is daunting but rewarding in the end.

Those two qualities make *Tales of Legendia* an extremely accessible game, and the art style also helps with this. Unlike *Tales of Symphonia*, which uses cel shading, *Legendia* keeps to a more traditionally solid style, with environments and characters that are so smooth and defined that they almost seem to glow. It's a bright, warm world that's inviting just to look at, let alone play. The music by Namco's internal sound team, including Go C-Na's signature fiddle-based pieces, is an absolutely perfect match for the look of the game.

If for whatever reason *Tales of Symphonia* didn't grab you, you might want to consider giving *Tales* another try with *Legendia*. Love it or hate it, at least with a game as direct as this, you'll know before long where you stand. | *Nich Maragos*

STATUS REPORT

Tales took its time coming to the United States, but English-speaking fans are almost up to speed now. In addition to *Tales of Destiny* and *Tales of Destiny 2* (originally called *Tales of Eternia* in Japan), we got *Tales of Symphonia* in 2004, and series originator *Tales of Phantasia* is due to appear on the GBA in early 2006. All we're missing: *Tales of the Abyss* (still unreleased in Japan and a likely candidate for a later U.S. conversion), *Tales of Rebirth*, and the real *Tales of Destiny 2*.

QUICK Nice, speedy fights, no fat on the story's bones

DIRTY Mediocre voice acting, not for anime haters

SCORE 4|5

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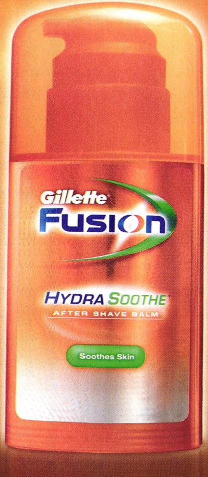

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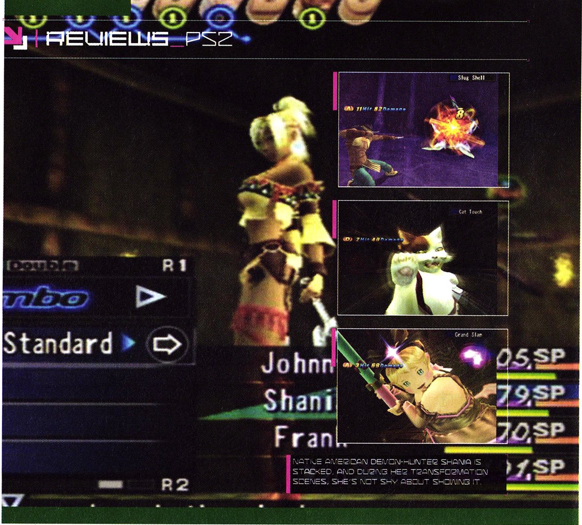

NATIVE AMERICAN DEMON-HUNTER SHANIA IS STACKED, AND DURING HER TRANSFORMATION SCENES, SHE'S NOT SHY ABOUT SHOWING IT.

PUB. XSeed DEV. Nautilus ESRB T MSRP $39.99

SHADOW HEARTS: FROM THE NEW WORLD

ALL THE STUFF YOU DON'T REMEMBER FROM HISTORY 101

Johnny Garland, 16-year-old private detective, steps out onto the streets of 1929 New York with his demon-hunting Native American friend in full tribal regalia, where a pair of traveling gay bikers leers at him before clearing out and allowing him free access to the treasure chest sitting out on the street. By this point in the review, you will probably already know whether *Shadow Hearts: From the New World* is a game for you.

Or maybe not. For while this *Shadow Hearts* game upholds the sheer craziness of the first two games' plots, running rampant across the "real world," its battle system actually seems less refined than those of the previous games, whose Judgement Ring system struck a nice balance between complexity and user-friendliness.

You still rely on precise timing with the Ring for lots of things here, but there's so much else complicating battles that it makes you long for games that just let you hit things. Sometimes you don't want to have to decide whether it's better to use a fusion attack, a normal one, a double attack, a combo with someone else, a double combo, or magic, all while keeping track of the enemies' relative vertical position. The onscreen display in battles tells the story—there's so much information to keep track of that it's hard to tell what all the numbers mean even after sitting through each of the tutorials.

If you can hang with the slightly overcooked combat, though, there are as many bizarre interpretations of reality as ever, with the added bonus that *From the New World* takes place in America rather than Europe, making the ludicrous twists on real-world history easier to spot. Ninja university professors, Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher as children in danger, and a kinder, gentler Al Capone are all part of the game's weird charm.

After low sales killed Midway's interest in the series, it was unknown if *Shadow Hearts* would continue in the U.S.—but XSeed has picked up the torch, and, on balance, it's clear that the company has made a good move. | Nich Maragos

ROARING Crazy plot, nicer graphics
DEPRESSION Overcomplicated battles, mediocre music

SCORE 3.5|5

PLAY IT

If you want to try *Shadow Hearts 3* for yourself, pop in this month's demo disc and witness the weirdness.

RECOMMENDED READING

If you want to learn about what was really going on around this time, check out: *The Untouchables*, by Eliot Ness; *The Roaring Twenties: An Eyewitness History*, by Thomas Streissguth; and *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, by Dee Brown.

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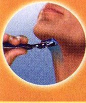

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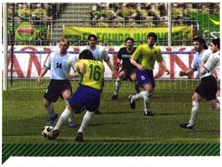


WINNING ELEVEN 9

THE ANTI-FIFA RETURNS, SCRAPPY AS EVER

PUB. Konami DEV. Konami ESRB E MSRP $49.99

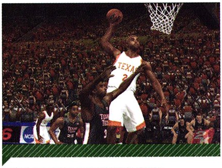
If you were to summarize the edge that *Winning Eleven* has over *FIFA* in a single word, that word would have to be "control." Whereas EA Sports' soccer game has pretty much always suffered from an uneasy sense of detachment, Konami's has always focused on letting you place the ball exactly where you need it. *WE9* is no different, and it goes some way toward improving on last year's game by doing something quite unusual: It has slowed things down. While this may seem like a reprehensible idea at first, in practice it allows you to focus far more on what each individual is doing, and coupled with the remapped controls, it gives you a greater sense of being able to completely direct what your players do.

As in the real thing, games are now won or lost in the midfield, and your dominance there is of paramount importance. By taking a completely different approach to your interaction with your players than *FIFA, WE9* provides a much more intimate experience as you place the ball exactly where you need it. Fakes, dummies, flicks, feints, and control moves both on the ground and in the air are now executed with a combination of face-button presses that are incredibly intuitive. Although the manual's *six pages* of button combos are initially as intimidating as a particularly complicated fighting game's, they soon become second nature. Worthy of particular note are the new controlled moves that you execute more accurately by using the R2 button. Hold it while shooting, for example, and your attacker will be sure to use the inside of his boot as the shot gauge builds and you unleash at the goalie.

Although veterans of the series will have to relearn the game a little, *WE9* proves yet again that it's not necessarily the glitz, glamour, and associated licenses of a sport that make the videogame version of it superb. Kudos to Konami for also including a Spanish-language version with the U.S. release. | *John Davison*

VERDICT Konami has expanded on the realism and sense of control that has become the foundation of the franchise.

SCORE 4.5 | 5



COLLEGE HOOPS 2K6

ALL THE FUNDAMENTALS, NONE OF THE EXCITEMENT

PUB. 2K Sports DEV. Visual Concepts ESRB E MSRP $29.99

One of the many great things about college basketball is that the crowd is just as important and just as intense as the game itself. The cheering, the band, the frantic waving of school colors—they all fuel players to drive down the court at breakneck speeds or to pass the ball around the perimeter with precision for a three-pointer. While *College Hoops* has more than enough in the game department, at times it just seems depressingly lifeless and boring—almost as if the development team was just going through the motions.

For some people this isn't going to matter all that much, especially considering that *College Hoops* has some decent gameplay mechanics and options. The on-the-court action does a pretty good job of mimicking the actual sport: Defenders play the passing lanes very well while in zone formations (maybe a little too well at times), and fast breaks are plentiful. Shooting is also easy as can be thanks to the right analog stick, which you can use for shooting, though it's worth pointing out that the shooting percentages seem a little bit off. Even when you're totally open or right underneath the basket, it seems a little too difficult to hit a clean shot most of the time. In addition, as always, the special moves found in 2K Sports' NBA games are included in *College Hoops*; they work well for the most part, but they do take a bit of getting used to if you're not particularly familiar with them.

Again, the gameplay is there, but the rest of the game is just so drab and shallow that you might as well being playing in an arena populated with a single cricket. It's just not very exciting to play or to watch, and for a college basketball game that just shouldn't be the case. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS Good fundamental basketball, legacy mode offers plenty of great features, lots of online options

CONS Graphics are spotty, sound is terrible, AI can be a little overzealous in playing passing lanes, it's just not that exciting at times

SCORE 3 | 5

PLAY IT

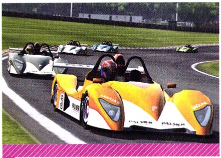
Looking for a toke o' *TOCA 3*? Look no further than this month's disc, where you'll find a playable demo.

WHAT'S A TOCA?

TOCA is an abbreviation for "touring cars." The franchise originally focused on simulating the British Touring Car series, though it's grown to the point where the BTCC is a miniscule part of the overall experience.

ONLINE UNIVERSITY

Like its *2K6* brethren, *College Hoops* has a lot of online options, including league play, which is generally a little more exciting than taking on any computer-controlled opponent---but good luck finding people to play against on the PS2.



TOCA RACE DRIVER 3

MASTER OF NONE

PUB. Codemasters DEV. Codemasters ESRB E MSRP $39.99

It's easy to appreciate what Codemasters is doing with the *TOCA* series. For a racing nut, the idea of a game featuring more than 35 different forms of motor sports—you can race go-karts, monster trucks, Formula 1 cars—from the makers of some of the best racing games in the world sounds almost too good to be true.

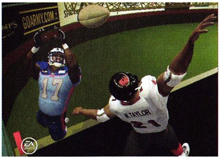
And it is. In the attempt to squeeze in so much variety, the game's physics engine has really suffered on most of the racing types. While the sports car and open-wheel asphalt racing is great in *TOCA*, anything on dirt feels awful. (Ironic considering this is the same studio that brings us the spectacular *Colin McRae Rally* series.) Plus, a lot of the Western-style racing is saddled with decidedly road-course rules. Who ever heard of a localized caution on a half-mile dirt oval? That's just stupid.

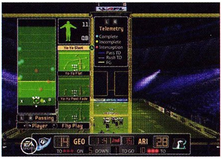
While the option to play online or in single-player championships is there, the career mode leaves a lot to be desired, mostly because the game is trying to give you a taste of every single racing style out there without ever letting you get too involved in just one. Seasons consisting of two races are common, and they quickly turn the career mode into a joke, since you never get the time to really learn each new motor sport or develop any sense of rivalry or partake in any sort of points battle over the length of a season.

Codemasters is attempting something wonderful here, as *TOCA* includes a lot of racing styles that you simply wouldn't find on a console otherwise. If the physics engine gets a complete overhaul and we get a more robust career mode for the inevitable *TOCA 4*, this series could regain the respect it once commanded. But for now, it's strictly for armchair racers who crave variety over substance. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT Amazing variety is offset by floaty physics and a crippled career mode. *TOCA 3* offers tons of choices and specializes in nothing.

SCORE 3 | 5





PUB. EA Sports DEV. EA Tiburon ESRB E10+ MSRP $39.99

ARENA FOOTBALL

MADDEN STREET?

Sure, the Arena Football League doesn't carry the same clout as the NFL, but that doesn't mean a good game can't be made out of its license. Considering that the AFL is based on offense, with 50-yard fields (compared to the NFL's 100-yarders) and 8-on-8 play (versus 11-on-11 in the NFL), it seems ideal for a high-scoring, arcade-style game of football. It's a shame, then, that while *Arena Football* mixes sim- and arcade-style play, it excels at neither.

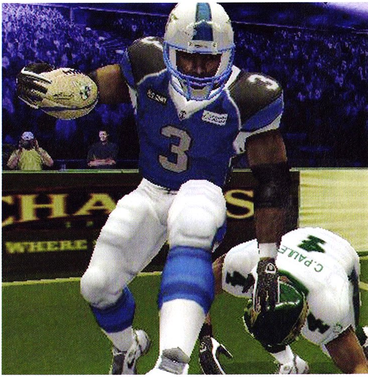
The uniqueness of the league gives the game some immediate kudos. Knocking an opposing player over the waist-high walls surrounding the field and into some tables is amusing the first few times. Also, overthrowing the ball into the in-play netting behind each end zone and having it bounce back into a receiver's hands is pretty nifty. Though these differences are fun, the novelty soon wears off, leaving just the hit-or-miss gameplay.

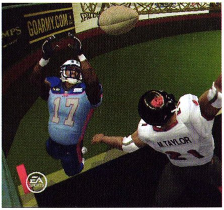
For the most part, the game plays well—very similar to *Madden* games, in fact—though it's a shame the flow is hampered by a limited playbook (which in turn makes single-player action especially tedious). Also, while many EA Sports games make creative use of the right analog stick for on-field moves (including *Madden* for big hits), *Arena Football*, in an odd move, maps the stick to an overly complex telemetry system, which basically boils down to a fatigue meter. Another problem: the atrocious running game. Granted, one could argue that the AFL is geared toward passing, which is a fully acceptable excuse. The problem lies in the execution of the rushing game, though. Jukes and stiff-arms, which supposedly make defenders miss, prove to be woefully ineffective, meaning your runner goes down far too easily. As for presentation, lots of animations, like one-handed grabs, keep things interesting, which is good since the lack of commentary and the pitiful crowd reactions disappoint.

While *Arena Football* plays well and offers some decent multiplayer fun, you'll find better sims—*Madden*, *NFL 2K*—and arcade-style games—*Blitz*, *NFL Street*—out there. Compared to them, *Arena Football* comes across as too underwhelming. | *Greg Ford*

VERDICT A mix of *Madden* and *Blitz*, though not as good as either.

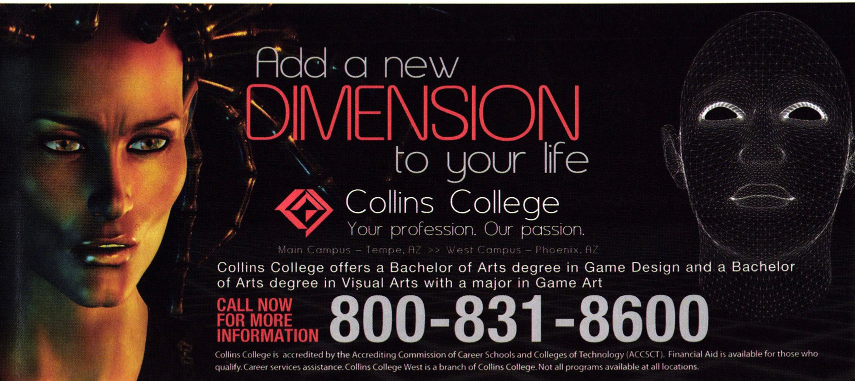
SCORE 3|5





THE MORE, THE BETTER?

By completing various challenges—say, passing a Be the Receiver challenge or completing a 40-yard TD in a game—you can unlock dozens of classic AFL teams. Cool, but it also makes you realize how much relocating a lot of AFL franchises have gone through.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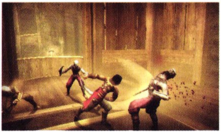


IF I RAN THE INDUSTRY

Every PSP game would have the following three features:

1. **Save anywhere, all the time.** Battery life is a fickle thing, and you can't always count on the game state being saved faithfully.

2. **Brightness adjustments.** The PSP is a portable system. Portable systems are played in a variety of lighting conditions. Dark games plus bright environments equals unpleasantness.

3. **Autosave.** Accessing the memory stick is so much quicker than accessing a PS2 memory card. PSP games should be exploiting that. Hint: If it requires *any* kind of confirmation, *it's not an autosave*!

| PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Ubisoft ESRB M MSRP $49.99

PRINCE OF PERSIA REVELATIONS

BEHOLD, A PALE HORSE

Imagine you had a dog as a child. He was the sweetest, smartest, most obedient dog you'd ever met. You told all your friends what a good dog he was and taught him all sorts of great doggie tricks. You loved that dog. That dog is *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*.

Then you went away to college. You came home years later to find that your dog couldn't play quite as well as he used to, and he didn't really remember all those old tricks. You still had fun with him, but you couldn't help mourning a little for the great dog that he no longer was. That's *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within*.

Now imagine you moved away. More years passed, and when you came home you found that your dog was just plain old. He couldn't walk straight, his hair was falling out, and he kind of smelled funny. He peed all over the carpets, and every so often he'd forget who you were and try to bite you. That's *Prince of Persia Revelations*. And oh, how I wish we could put this old dog down.

While *Revelations* adds a moderate amount of content to *Warrior Within*, at its core it is essentially the same game. You might not think that would be such a bad thing; after all, on PS2 *Warrior Within* is a fairly decent experience (albeit by far the worst of the PS2 *Princes*). Here's the thing: Every single problem that *Warrior Within* has—crash bugs, out-of-sync audio, and all—is magnified on the PSP.

The biggest issue for me is the controls: The imprecise nature of the PSP's analog nub makes the tricky jumps and other platforming elements unbelievably floaty and frustrating. I lost count of the number of times I jumped the wrong way off a column, missed a wall jump, or just simply ran off a ledge. And while the *Prince* games have always been forgiving of missteps, it's obvious that no attempt was made to offer a little more leeway to compensate for the less-precise controller.

More constantly bothersome, though, is the fact that the dark, monotonous color scheme we knew and hated from *Warrior Within* frequently renders the game practically unplayable in anything other than a completely black room. You'll be minding your own business, walking down a hallway, and suddenly you're losing health because you've walked right into a spike trap that *you can't see*.

Add to this the reappearance of *Warrior Within*'s painfully repetitive dual-timeline formula and the addition of frequent, extensive load times, and you've got one of the most egregious examples of the PSP's lazy port syndrome.

The Two Thrones made *Warrior Within* look much worse; I never expected something to come along to make it look *better*. | Joe Rybicki

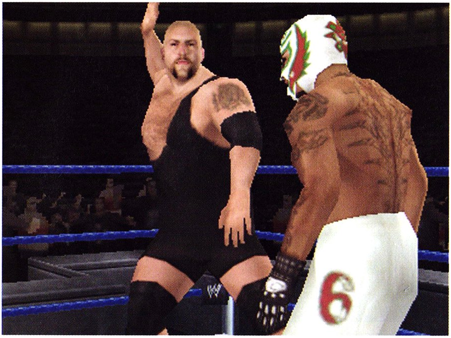
> EVERY SINGLE PROBLEM IS MAGNIFIED ON THE PSP.

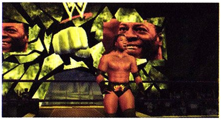
VERDICT *Warrior Within* was a disappointment. Reproducing it without fixing its problems is a crime. Adding in new problems is an insult.

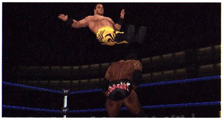
SCORE 2.5 | 5

HOT MAMA

The woman behind the voice of Kaileena in the game is none other than Italian actress Monica Bellucci, who you may know from her role as Persephone in *The Matrix Revolutions* and *The Matrix Reloaded*.







PUB. THQ DEV. Yuke's ESRB M MSRP $49.99

WWE SMACKDOWN! VS. RAW 2006

WORTH THE WAIT

The fact that *WWE SmackDown! vs. RAW 2006* is an almost identical port of its PlayStation 2 counterpart is an amazing accomplishment, especially considering how much content the PS2 version features. Unfortunately, it's also somewhat of a curse for the PSP in this case because the loading times are absolutely terrible. In fact, they're so bad that there even seems to be loading screens for the loading screens. It's not even that battery life becomes an issue as a result of this; it's just very irritating.

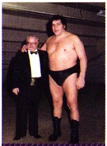
That being said, this is one of the best wrestling games created to date. The gameplay mechanics—with the exception of being able to execute multiple finishers in a single match—mimic the flow and feel of professional wrestling incredibly well. More specifically, stamina (which you have to recharge periodically through the match) and momentum shifts have been integrated in a way that makes matches a little longer than they normally are in most wrestling games, which is great from a gameplay standpoint (though not so much when you're out on the road and looking for a quick fix).

Other aspects of THQ's flagship wrestling series have also been revamped for the better. The story mode has full voice acting from the actual wrestlers, and not only are their performances good, but the story lines themselves are worthy of WWE programming. Any fan will have a blast playing through it, but perhaps the best new feature is the general manager mode, in which you essentially take charge of one of the two shows—*SmackDown* or *RAW*—and control everything from who faces whom that night to promotions and match types. The goal is to have a better show than the competition, and you'll have access to plenty of data to ensure that's happening. The general manager mode is so good that you'll probably wonder why some developers didn't try a mode like this sooner.

The catch is that if you've played the console version, then none of this will be new to you. While you can transfer data between the two versions—which is a cool feature indeed—that's not really enough incentive to own them both. However, if you still haven't bought either, the PSP version may be worth your while. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS Nearly a perfect port of the PS2 game; great graphics, sound, and gameplay
CONS Multiplayer is ad hoc, long load times, bit of a learning curve, nearly the same as the PS2 version

SCORE 4.5



OLD SCHOOL
If you're hankering for some old-timey wrestling action, you can access loads of classic wrestlers here. The roster includes Andre the Giant, Bret "The Hitman" Hart, Hulk Hogan, and Jake "The Snake" Roberts.

WORLD SOCCER WINNING ELEVEN 9

LIKE THE PS2 GAME, ONLY NOT QUITE AS GOOD

PUB. Konami DEV. Konami ESRB E MSRP $49.99

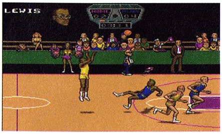
Another PSP game, another slightly crippled port. Depending on how you look at it, it's either incredible that Konami managed to squeeze nearly everything from the PS2 version into the portable game, or it's just plain bizarre that the company left certain things out. For a quick overview of what makes *WE9* so good, check out the other review this month. With that out of the way, we can get into the juicier business of picking on the PSP version for its inadequacies.

First, we have the obvious stuff, the most heinous of which is that the load times are slap-you-in-the-face *baaaaaaad.* The first time you jump from the menu system to the pitch, you'll think your PSP gave up the ghost, because it takes over a minute before you see any signs of life. The only clue that anything is going on is the painful "graunch" of the UMD drive. Second is the fact that the PSP has two fewer buttons than a DualShock 2, and the PS2 game uses every button on the pad. What to do? Double-tap for some moves and hold down multiple buttons for others; it requires relearning the game, and some of the combos just aren't that intuitive. Then there's the fact that although the game is superficially a stunning facsimile of its grown-up, TV-bound brother, it lacks the Master League mode, which is the real meat of that game. Considering the game features a PS2-to-PSP USB link, this is a major disappointment. Master League on PS2 is a lengthy career mode that's guaranteed to tweak the obsessive-compulsive tendencies of every soccer fan who plays it, and it's something that would be absolutely *perfect* to continue while away from your TV. Its omission here leaves the transfer of teams and players between devices feeling somewhat redundant and gimmicky. Perhaps we'll see this in *Winning Eleven 10.*

All said, though, as a single-match footy game, *WE9* is a visceral and satisfying experience that provides a greater sense of connection with the sport than *FIFA* manages. Sadly, its inadequacies can't justify the same score as the PS2 game. | *John Davison*

VERDICT The lack of the PS2's Master League mode hits this one where it hurts.

SCORE 4.5



MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES: EXTENDED PLAY

LUKEWARM NOSTALGIA

PUB. Midway DEV. Midway
ESRB M MSRP $39.99

Watching *The Terminator* back in its day was mind-blowing. The special effects were unbelievable, some of the coolest things ever to cross a movie screen. Now, however, though the movie itself is still pretty good, the special effects have fallen from totally awesome to pretty low-tech.

It's the same kind of situation with *Extended Play*. The collection includes games that were great and are still pretty good, but they're starting to become more important for posterity's sake than because they're something you'd actually pick up and play for any huge length of time.

Extended Play includes a whole slew of games, but though some of them—like *Defender* and *Sinistar*—hold up pretty well and provide a decent round of gaming, others, most notably *Mortal Kombat II* and *Mortal Kombat 3*, just aren't really all that fun to play, thanks to their awkward controls. Also an issue is how the games are presented onscreen—some get stretched across the whole screen, skewing their proportions, while others are rendered as a vertical rectangle centered on the screen, making them impossibly small.

The package's presentation is incredibly minimal as well, with the games all dropped into the most generic of interfaces. Existing wireless multiplayer works well, but you're still stuck with the same issues of visibility and awkwardness that you have in the single-player games, so it begs the question of how fun wireless play actually is.

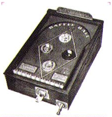
For Midway to produce a collection that would truly be considered essential, it will have to spend a lot more time finessing the ports of these games, which might negate the whole strategy (and profitability) of these packages in the first place, which is to make a quick and easy buck off of nostalgia. Sure, companies need to make money, so I don't condemn Midway for continuing to do this—but that doesn't mean we have to buy *Extended Play*. | Dana Jongewaard

VERDICT Just because you *can* play these games on PSP doesn't mean you *should*.

SCORE 3|5

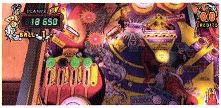
BLOOD AND GUTS

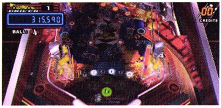
The M rating on *Extended Play* comes to you courtesy of *Mortal Kombat II* and *Mortal Kombat 3*. Apparently, it doesn't matter how pixelated you get: Pulling someone's heart out just isn't cool with the ESRB.



OLD-TIMER

The most successful pinball table that Gottlieb & Co. ever made was *Baffle Ball*, which sold more than 50,000 units back in 1931.





PINBALL HALL OF FAME: THE GOTTLIEB COLLECTION

THEY CALL ME "FLIPPER"

PUB. Crave DEV. FarSight Studios
ESRB E MSRP $29.99

I am at best a casual pinball player, but every once in a while, I enjoy throwing away a few quarters. There's something about the physical interaction with a table that's satisfying, even if I'm no wizard.

Pinball Hall of Fame can't give you that physical feeling, but it can offer up 10 classic tables that you never have to drop a quarter into. You can work on fulfilling a specific goal for each table or try the Gottlieb Challenge, which runs you through all the tables in a row. Instructions are available for each table, pointing out the places to go to score points—a great addition for tables you're not familiar with.

The graphics look really nice, but a short widescreen doesn't accommodate a tall, vertical table very well. There is an option to flip the table so that it's oriented vertically on the screen, but you can't change among the three camera viewpoints in that orientation. The Tilt button is also practically inaccessible in the vertical mode, although that's not too much of a loss since it's so sensitive that you rarely use it unless you're trying to save a ball from dropping.

Since the shoulder buttons serve as the primary controls, I found myself gripping the PSP tightly by the sides. And that meant I often accidentally turned off the power by rubbing the side-mounted power switch. When I wasn't short-circuiting the game myself, there were bugs to contend with—about once an hour, the game would freeze and I'd have to restart.

Restarts, bad viewpoint, accidental perspectives, and all, I still had fun playing *Pinball Hall of Fame*. But it mostly just made me want to go find some real-life pinball tables. | Dana Jongewaard

GOOD Good quick bursts of gaming, pretty tables
BAD Poor table visibility, buggy

SCORE 2.5|5

MEGA MAN MAVERICK HUNTER X

FEELS LIKE A NEW GAME...ALMOST

PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom
ESRB E MSRP $29.99

Out of all the rereleases that have come out in the past few years, *Mega Man Maverick Hunter X* stands as an example of what every developer should do—actually take advantage of the new hardware and seize the opportunity to add something new. In fact, the locations of some items have been changed around, so even if you have played the original *Mega Man X*, chances are good that you'll have a few head-scratching moments followed by an "I don't remember that being there."

You'll certainly think that way about the graphics. *Maverick Hunter X* looks fantastic thanks to new and incredibly vibrant 3D characters and backgrounds that fit the *Mega Man* world perfectly. These new visuals only help to reinforce the feeling of playing an entirely new game...though in some cases, you actually *are* playing a new game.

In addition to some special items being relocated (like the upgrades that X can obtain by exploring some of the levels), there's actually an entirely new playable character named Vile, who you encounter in the first level of the game when he attacks you in his mech. He even has a unique story line (yes, more story elements have been introduced as well) and play style. You really can't ask for any more from a remake.

The only problem is that the game is pretty standard stuff as far as *Mega Man* titles go. It's still the same formula of beating up several bosses and using their weapons against them before moving on. The game is fun to play through and remains challenging, but the fact that this is indeed a port of a much older game—as evidenced by its repetitive nature—still pokes its head in every now and then. | Giancarlo Varanini

PROS Great graphics, sound, and extras
CONS Still a port of an old game, action gets kind of repetitive due to the old formula

SCORE 4|5

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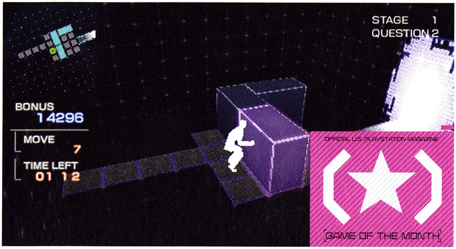
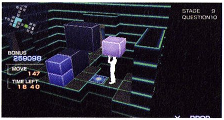
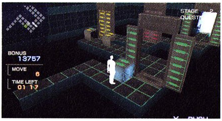
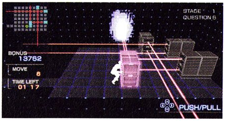
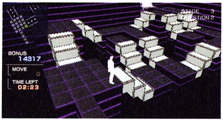










PUB. D3 Publisher DEV. Nowpro ESRB E MSRP $29.99

PQ: PRACTICAL INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT

PREPARE FOR THE SMARTENING

Most puzzle games are, in some fashion, tests of intelligence. But *PQ* is, to my knowledge, the first game to actually claim to be a true IQ test. With its 100 levels (or "questions," as they're called), the game throws at you a variety of tests of spatial reasoning, timing, simple math, and memory.

The surprising thing is that, while it may sound like a bad afternoon in school, the game is actually astonishingly addictive. This is in large part due to its stark simplicity: You control a featureless white silhouette in a futuristic, *Tron*-like VR environment, and your only goal is to get to the exit of each room. Doing so may entail moving boxes, opening color-coded doors, even dodging guards—but all these behaviors are controlled with a single action button. Like all great puzzle games, *PQ* is simple enough to pick up instantly, but complex enough that even the smartest player might have trouble getting past some of the later levels.

In fact, the game's only fault lies in its handling of failed levels. Due, I assume, to the IQ-test structure and a desire to make it difficult to cheat your way to a genius level, you can't go back and replay failed questions without replaying the entire game. You do have the option of replaying 10-level stages, but only if you've passed all 10 levels in the main game. Fail just one and you can't replay any in that stage without playing through the stage again in the main game. This severely limits the game's replay value, sacrificing one of the primary criteria for a truly legendary puzzle game—and it's especially damaging for a portable game.

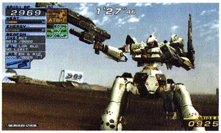
Still, the experience is satisfying enough the first time through that it's an easy recommendation for any fan of puzzle games. The later levels may prove maddening, and getting *this* close to beating a level only to have the time run out on you is terribly frustrating. But it's a rare game that actually makes you smarter—and makes the process both entertaining and addictive. *PQ* succeeds on all counts. | *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT It'll stretch your brain like taffy… but it's a bit short on replay value.

SCORE 4.5 | 5

FATED TO WIN
If you're into the "decided from the beginning" gameplay style of the Japanese version of *Formula Front*, the A.I. option still exists, or you could try *Mega Man Battle Chip Challenge* for the GBA.

YOU ARE SO SMRT
So, Mr. Mensa, want to see how that big brain of yours really stacks up against the competition? Beat *PQ* and you'll have the option of checking your score against those of *PQ* players all over the world via the PSP's infrastructure networking.



ARMORED CORE: FORMULA FRONT

AGETEC TURNS LEAD INTO GOLD

PUB. Agetec DEV. From Software
ESRB T MSRP $39.99

Based on the import version of the game, I was pretty sure I was going to hate *Armored Core: Formula Front*. After all, the original is basically a tech demo in which each battle's outcome is decided as soon as the match begins; the player's input is limited to customizing a mech and adjusting a few AI sliders. It's the worst kind of gameplay-free waste of a player's money and seemed like an easy candidate for the worst game yet released on the PSP. My knives, as they say, were out.

Funny how things change.

The reason for the long delay for the American release, it turns out, is that From Software went and made Pinocchio-like changes to turn *Formula Front* into a real game. Having done so, all the things that previously made the game a bore become positive assets.

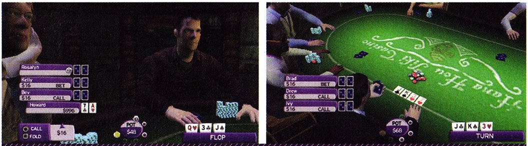
For example, since the original offers nothing but customization, there is at least a numbing amount of it to be done. It's almost the *Gran Turismo* of mech combat games, with tons of options available for even esoteric parts like radiators and generators—not to mention the ability to tune those parts more precisely once you've installed them. Putting all that into the service of a real combat engine might actually make this one of the best *Armored Core* games on any system.

As thoughtful as adding true controls is, they're not perfect, with the action suffering slightly due to the PSP's lack of a second analog stick. There's a lock-on window, so you don't have to be too precise with your shots, but it still feels sluggish when the enemy has moved behind you and you're trying to swing the camera around.

Still, *Formula Front* turned out surprisingly well for a late-stage retrofitting. Kudos to From for a pretty successful bit of alchemy. | *Nich Maragos*

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE New and welcome manual control…
THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME …even if it feels a tiny bit tacked on.

SCORE 3.5 | 5



PUB. Crave DEV. Point of View ESRB T MSRP $29.99

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POKER 2 FEATURING HOWARD LEDERER

SHUFFLE UP AND WAIT

I have a personal favor to ask of you game developers. In the future, when porting PS2 games to PSP, I would like for you to do the following: Take a UMD of your unfinished game and put it in a PSP. Go ride a bus or subway. Play your game in a variety of settings, under a variety of lighting conditions. Make several different trips of varying lengths.

Now, ask yourself: Do the controls still work? Can I see everything onscreen OK? Did I spend more time playing than loading? If the answer to any of these questions is "no," go back to the studio and *change it*.

WCP2 is a perfectly adequate game on PS2—definitely the most realistic poker game in terms of your opponents' play (though that's not saying much). But on PSP, the minor annoyances of the PS2 version become major. You can almost hear the slow, unskippable animations chewing through your battery life. The neat rotate-the-stick bluffing minigame becomes simply annoying with the analog nub. And the career mode takes for*ever* due to the ridiculous load times.

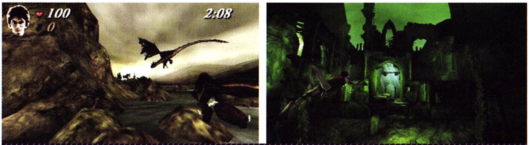
The simple infrastructure multiplayer adds some replay value, but overall this port is poorly thought out. | *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT A poor port of a solid game.

SCORE 2.5|5

POKER FACE

One of the best ideas in *World Championship Poker 2* is the inclusion of the bluffing minigame in infrastructure play—meaning you might actually learn something by watching the behavior of your opponents. You also get the option to flaunt your hand if you win uncontested.



PUB. EA Games DEV. EA Games ESRB E10+ MSRP $49.99

HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE

PSP • MINI-ME

With so many PSP games out there that are barely different from their full-size counterparts, there's little to no reason to buy both versions. *Harry Potter* is one such example. Aside from a few minor changes—some added minigames, an excised level—this is the same game as its PS2 counterpart.

Play as Harry, Ron, or Hermione (and bring in friends to play cooperatively with you), fight your way through the three challenges of the Triwizard Tournament, and collect beans to purchase upgrades in the form of cards. It's obvious that the developers assumed some level of familiarity with the plot; there's little here in the way of the story. And the minigames that have been added to this version are pretty insubstantial.

The graphics look pretty, and while the controls and camera can sometimes suffer in a PSP port, these make the transition intact, which means they're very serviceable if not excellent. However, there's really nothing new about the game. And though that's not necessarily a bad thing, it *does* mean that there is absolutely no reason to own both versions of the game. | *Dana Jongewaard*

VERDICT Same as the PS2 game, so pick one or the other.

SCORE 3.5|5

FAMOUS GOBLETS

Other renowned goblets in history include the Holy Grail, Lil John's jewel-encrusted chalice, and the 72-ounce 7-Eleven cup in Giancarlo's car.

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[The Rock, Karl Urban]

DOOM

ONE (VERY) SMALL STEP

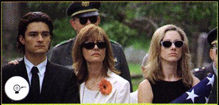
by John Scalzi

As far as videogame movies go, *Doom* is middlin' acceptable: It's got one big star (The Rock), a couple of other recognizable faces (most prominently Karl "I Was Eomer!" Urban), and a director—urban-action specialist Andrzej Bartkowiak—who has some sense of where to point his camera. It also features a few clever touches, like naming characters Carmack and Willits (two of the folks at id Software who created the *Doom* game), and sequences where we see the action from a first-person-shooter perspective, which is a nice acknowledgment of where this film originally comes from.

So: not bad for a videogame film. But now let's remember that videogame films are one of most debased genres of film known to the human race—on average so idiotically written, acted, and directed that as a class they're barely a step up from erotic bug-crush videos (and when Uwe Boll is directing, a couple of steps down). Saying that *Doom* is a decent videogame film is like saying you're happy your kid no longer needs padded spoons to eat soup; yes, it's a good thing, but think about where you're starting from.

Compared to real films, *Doom* is fairly lame, and ironically, pales in most ways (including special effects) to *Doom 3*, the most recent iteration of the videogame. When your movie makes less sense than a game that requires mere repetitive demon-shotgunning, that's bad news. I like The Rock and I even like Karl Urban, but there's not a moment in this flick when I wasn't thinking, "I could be playing the game instead of watching this," which makes it no different from any other videogame film. I wonder if there will ever be a videogame film that makes me think otherwise.

SCORE 2|5

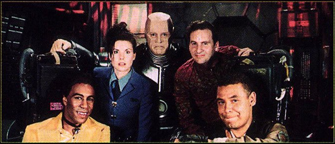


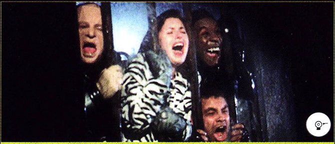
ELIZABETHTOWN

Orlando Bloom, Kirsten Dunst

Cameron Crowe films are either dead-on about people (*Say Anything*, *Jerry Maguire*, *Almost Famous*) or couldn't figure out where they were going if they had a map and a GPS tracker (*Singles*, *Vanilla Sky*). This film is in the second category: Orlando Bloom is supposed to use the death of his dad to help find himself (with help from Kirsten Dunst), but the film keeps getting sidetracked and not much happens. A shame. Pretty cast, though.

SCORE 2.5|5





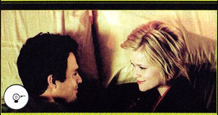
DOCTOR WHO/RED DWARF VII

Christopher Eccleston, Craig Charles

It's a big month for people who like resurrected British science-fiction series. First up: *Doctor Who*. The original run of this series went from 1963 through 1989 and featured special effects that looked as though they cost a pound and twenty pence an episode. The 2005 version is pretty much a ground-up reinvention: better production values, better acting, better stories—and a doctor (Christopher Eccleston) who doesn't appear to have been marinated in a vat of twee.

Of course, if you're really hardcore, you'll be checking out *Red Dwarf Series VII*, the long-delayed seventh season of that comedy sci-fi show about a bunch of losers on a spaceship 3 million years in the future. This show's cheese factor is still maxed out, its effects are still lame, and it's still pure geeky fun. Enjoy.

SCORE 4|5



JUST LIKE HEAVEN

Reese Witherspoon, Mark Ruffalo

This is a very cute romantic film that becomes unspeakably creepy if you spend any time at all thinking about it afterward, so don't. Mark Ruffalo is a man who discovers that a woman looking just like Reese Witherspoon is in his apartment; normally, this would be regarded as a good thing, but, see, she doesn't really exist, and Ruffalo has to figure out if she's a ghost or if he's lost his marbles or what (it's "what"). Supermega ultra date-film material.

SCORE 3.5|5

PROOF

Gwyneth Paltrow, Anthony Hopkins

So there I was, typing up a review a couple of years ago and feeling pretty damn pleased with my writing life and how it was going when I looked over at the news and discovered my college classmate Dave Auburn had won the friggin' Pulitzer Prize for his play *Proof*. So there's some excellent career perspective for you. However, *Proof* deserved the accolades, and the movie is pretty good, too. So this is me pimpin' Dave's film to y'all.

SCORE 4|5

WALLACE & GROMIT

Ralph Fiennes, Helena Bonham Carter

As an animation fan, I've always felt mildly ashamed that I've found the *Wallace & Gromit* short films only mildly amusing; I could see why people adored them, but they weren't quite there for me. *Were-Rabbit* fixes that—it's ridiculous and clever and quaint, and "quaint" is not a word one gets to use much about animation these days, and Gromit the dog is definitively the best silent comedy actor since Buster Keaton. Not bad for plasticine.

SCORE 4.5|5

MIRRORMASK

Stephanie Leonidas, Gina McKee

Graphic novel icons Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean were given $4 million to make a movie, and let's just say that visually speaking, these guys know how to stretch a dollar until it screams. *MirrorMask* is 200-proof freaky-ass eye candy, the sort of film you wish they would make a videogame from, so you could spend time wandering through every nook and cranny of the world. If these guys had $100 million, your head might explode.

SCORE 4|5

SAW II

Tobin Bell, Donnie Wahlberg

The original *Saw* was a fairly nasty piece of work (trap people in a room, make them do unspeakable things to escape), so it stands to reason that the sequel would have to up the nastiness just to keep up. And it does! There's a heartwarming lesson for you. There's a plot, but does it matter when people are digging into their eyeballs and playing with dirty syringes? Probably not. Horror fans , have fun. Everyone else, stay far, far away.

SCORE 2|5

ZATHURA

Tim Robbins, Dax Shepard

Finally! The sequel to *Jumanji* that—as far as I've been able to tell—not one single human being in the world was waiting for! Which might explain its less-than-stellar performance at the box office. But we took our kid to it and she liked all the robots and space lizards and special effects, so if you are a kid, have a kid, or, thanks to a transplant, are a kid at heart, this film will probably work as intended.

SCORE 3.5|5

DVD RELEASE

February 7

Doom

Elizabethtown

Just Like Heaven

Wallace & Gromit: Curse/Were-Rabbit

February 14

MirrorMask

Proof

Saw II

Zathura

February 21

The Weather Man

UMD RELEASE

February 7

Batman

Doom

Training Day

Viewtiful Joe Volume 1

February 14

MirrorMask

Saw II

Zathura

February 21

Rounders

Swingers

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Some of us are takers.

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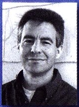

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REPLAY

REVVING UP THE PLAYSTATION WAYBACK MACHINE

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1UP AWARDS

YOU PICK THE GAMES OF THE YEAR

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LOOK SHARP

PS2 GAMES TO MAKE THE MOST OF THAT NEW HDTV

INSIDE

110 **FORGOTTEN GEM: JUMPING FLASH!**
The PS1's high-flying mecha-rabbit is unearthed. Think *Super Mario 64* was the first 3D platformer? Think again.

111 **PS1-DERLAND**
Nope, the PSP was not Sony's first handheld gaming system. Behold, the ill-fated PocketStation!

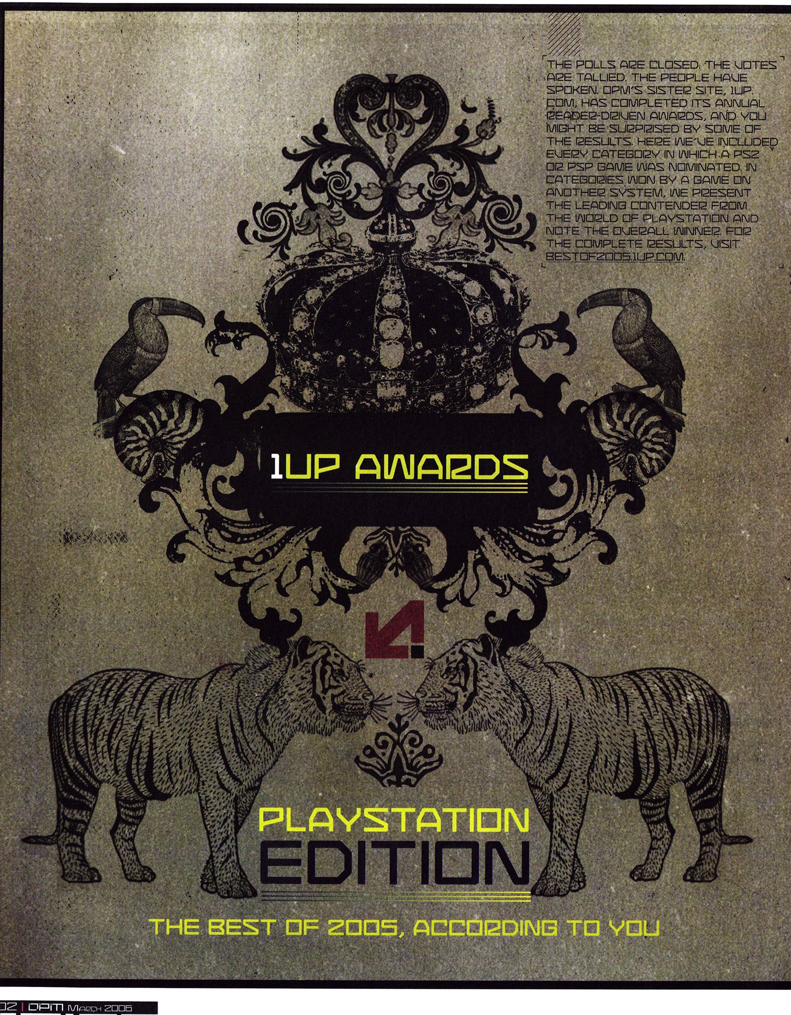
112 **PLAYSTATION'S BIGGEST MISSES**
Overlooked, underrated, or perhaps just underappreciated, these games deserve a second chance.

1UP AWARDS

PLAYSTATION EDITION

THE BEST OF 2005, ACCORDING TO YOU

THE POLLS ARE CLOSED. THE VOTES ARE TALLIED. THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN. OPM'S SISTER SITE, 1UP.COM, HAS COMPLETED ITS ANNUAL READER-DRIVEN AWARDS, AND YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED BY SOME OF THE RESULTS. HERE WE'VE INCLUDED EVERY CATEGORY IN WHICH A PS2 OR PSP GAME WAS NOMINATED. IN CATEGORIES WON BY A GAME ON ANOTHER SYSTEM, WE PRESENT THE LEADING CONTENDER FROM THE WORLD OF PLAYSTATION AND NOTE THE OVERALL WINNER. FOR THE COMPLETE RESULTS, VISIT BESTOF2005.1UP.COM.



GAME OF THE YEAR

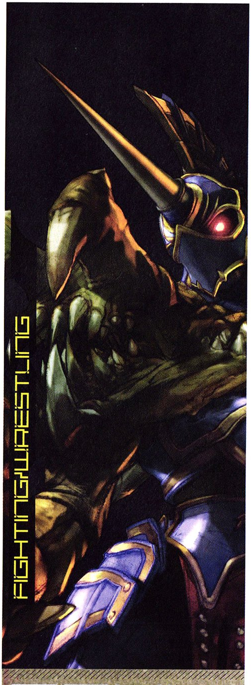
1UP AWARDS

RESIDENT EVIL 4

With the PS2 port of this action-packed zombie-massacre masterpiece proving to be every bit as excellent as the original GameCube version, it's not hard to see why *RE4* took top honors this year. What is surprising is that the PC RPG *Guild Wars* was hot on its heels—and that *God of War* trailed in a very distant third place.

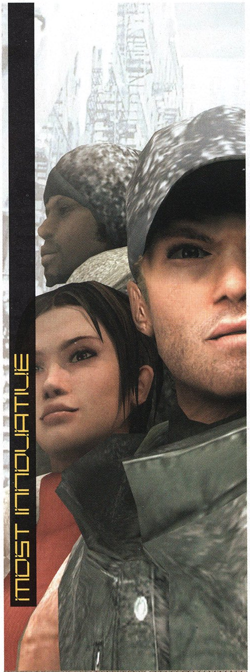
SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

Few games epitomize the idea of adventure better than *Shadow of the Colossus*, so good job selecting it as Adventure Game of the Year. It's also worth noting that *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* made a very respectable showing in second place.



SOUL CALIBUR III

Well, duh. While *Dead or Alive 4* on Xbox 360 didn't do too badly, what else of note was there this year? *SmackDown! vs. RAW 2006*? *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection*? This one was a no-brainer.

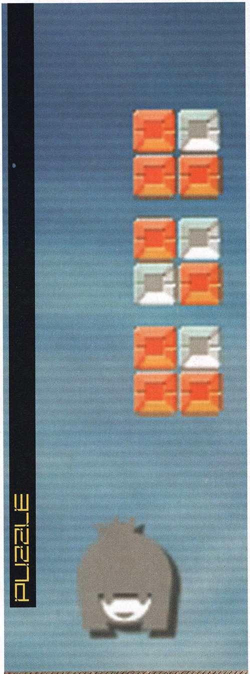


MOST INNOVATIVE

INDIGO PROPHECY

OVERALL WINNER: Nintendogs (Nintendo DS)

This is a pleasant shock. *Nintendogs*, the virtual pet simulator for the Nintendo DS, surprised no one by coasting into first place here, but seeing the delightfully unorthodox occult adventure *Indigo Prophecy* take the runner-up position warmed our hearts.



PUZZLE

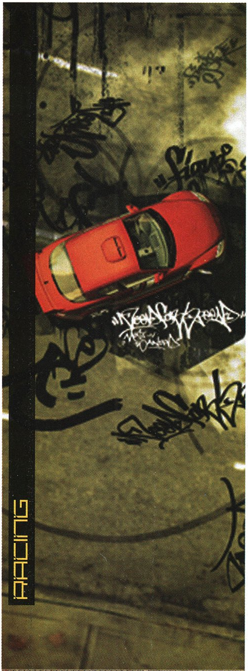
LUMINES

Tetsuya Mizuguchi went head-to-head with himself this year, with *Lumines* and his DS puzzler *Meteos* battling it out for top honors. In the end, though, *Lumines* won handily, proving that...um...the PSP rules all? Or perhaps just that simpler games are more widely appealing.

ACTION

RE4

Before *RE4*, we'd never have dreamed that a *Resident Evil* game would not only earn a nomination for Action Game of the Year but actually win the award easily. *God of War* made a better showing in this category than in Game of the Year, but *RE4* still cleaned up.

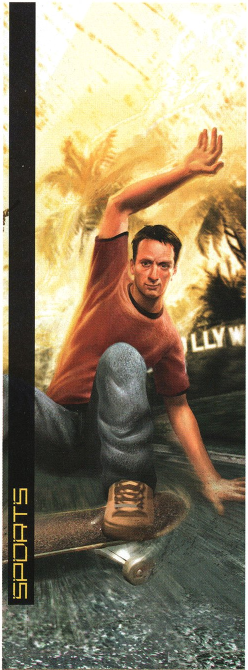


RACING

NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

OVERALL WINNER: Mario Kart DS (Nintendo DS)

Huh. So what you're saying is you prefer a handheld kart racer and an only slightly warmed-over rehash of *Need for Speed Underground* to the spectacular adrenaline rush of *Burnout Revenge,* which trailed in third place. You people are crazy. But hey, it's your awards show.



SPORTS

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND

OVERALL WINNER: Madden NFL 2006 (Xbox 360)

Madden only *just* edged out *THAW* for top honors here, which for *THAW* is quite a feat, as the *Madden* series routinely tops the sales charts year after year. It's doubly impressive since we think *THAW* is one of the least inspiring *Tony Hawk* games in years.

ONLINE MULTIPLAYER

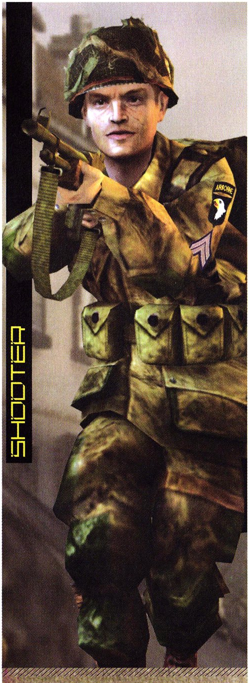
STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II

OVERALL WINNER: Battlefield 2 (PC)

Yeah, we're all *Star Wars* fans, so we can't blame you for voting with your nostalgic little hearts. And we can't really fault you PC gamers for praising a game designed pretty much exclusively for online play. But seeing the PSP's excellent *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo* limping along in *ninth* place—that's just hurtful.

DRAGON QUEST VIII: JOURNEY OF THE CURSED KING

Is it possible? Could it be that gamers in the United States have finally caught on to what the Japanese have known for years? Yes, the *Dragon Quest* franchise really does well and truly rock, and you should all pat yourselves on the back for recognizing this fact.



BROTHERS IN ARMS: EARNED IN BLOOD

OVERALL WINNER: Call of Duty 2 (PC, Xbox 360)

Don't get too excited there, *Brothers in Arms* fans—this is a pretty hollow victory. Yes, *Earned in Blood* was the highest-ranking game on a PlayStation platform, but it placed *eighth*...admittedly against some very stiff competition from the likes of *F.E.A.R.*, *Half-Life 2*, and *Doom 3*.

2005

OPM PICKS

Tom Byron

THE INCREDIBLE HULK: ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION

Big open worlds, excellent controls, awesome action—this underrated gem shows the right way to make a superhero game.

Joe Rybicki

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES

It's the best game in one of the best series around, with one of the best endings ever.

Dana Jongewaard

GOD OF WAR

An action game without all the fat, leaving a nice meaty slab of gaming goodness.

Giancarlo Varanini

GUITAR HERO

No other game lets you live out a life dream of being a fake rock star quite like *Guitar Hero*.

Thierry Nguyen

RESIDENT EVIL 4

A perfect example of how to redeem a series that's lurched into crap.

Logan Parr

RESIDENT EVIL 4

This is a prime example of taking your game to the next level. Absolutely amazing in every way.

Ryan Vulk

METAL GEAR ACID

A perfect addition of story and gameplay to a flawless series.

Alejandro Chavetta

BURNOUT REVENGE

With better cars and more breakage, it is the logical (faster and better-looking) evolution of *Burnout 3*. Simply addictive.

SOUL CALIBUR III

"THE HD ERA REALLY ONLY STARTS WHEN WE ARE ON THE MARKET." THAT'S ACCORDING TO SONY BIGWIG PHIL HARRISON, SPEAKING OF THE UPCOMING PS3 IN A RECENT INTERVIEW WITH GAMESINDUSTRY .BIZ. BUT DOES THAT MEAN YOUR SHINY NEW HDTV IS NOTHING BUT AN EXPENSIVE PAPERWEIGHT UNTIL SONY ROLLS OUT ITS NEW BOX?

WELL, NOT REALLY. A SURPRISING NUMBER OF PS2 GAMES ALREADY TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE HIGHER RESOLUTION AND WIDESCREEN DISPLAY ON YOUR NEW TOY. THE PROBLEM IS THAT THERE'S REALLY NO STANDARD HD GUIDE FOR PS2 GAMERS. SOME GAMES DESCRIBE RESOLUTION AND WIDESCREEN SUPPORT RIGHT ON THE BOX. SOME DON'T. SOME LET YOU ADJUST THE SETTINGS VIA THE IN-GAME MENU. SOME REQUIRE STRANGE BOOT-UP BUTTON SEQUENCES AND ANIMAL SACRIFICES TO RUN AT 480P. IT'S ALL RATHER FRUSTRATING.

SO BECAUSE WE LOVE YOU, WE'VE COMPILED A LIST OF SOME OF THE BEST HD-COMPATIBLE PS2 GAMES AND EXPLAIN EXACTLY HOW YOU UNLEASH THE HIGH-RES POWER OF EACH DISC.

LOOK SHARP

THE HD ERA IS ALREADY HERE

GOD OF WAR

(Sony CEA)

Not only is *God of War* one of the best action games to grace the PS2, but it's probably the one that takes the best advantage of your HDTV. The intricate textures on the main character and in most of the levels really pop when you set the game to progressive-scan mode, and the widescreen setting features little to no cropping, unlike in a lot of other PlayStation 2 titles.

Both settings can be changed at any time during the game by entering the options menu. That's good because it means there are no weird button combos or setup screens to keep you from simply jumping into the mythical beast slayin' and hot Greek threesomes of the main game.

SOCOM 3: U.S. NAVY SEALS

(Sony CEA)

Another of the PlayStation 2 games to feature the rare true 16:9 support (as in, the screen doesn't get horribly cropped and zoomed) is *SOCOM 3.* Access the widescreen and progressive-scan settings right in the options menu in order to experience the fight on terror the way it was meant to be seen. Now you can really see the whites of their eyes before you fire.

GRAN TURISMO 4

(Sony CEA)

Gran Turismo 4 is the only PlayStation 2 game that supports a resolution of 1080i, though you can still set the game to 480p if you really want to. Both options—plus the widescreen mode—can be accessed from the menu found in your garage. Oddly enough, none of this is mentioned on the game's packaging.

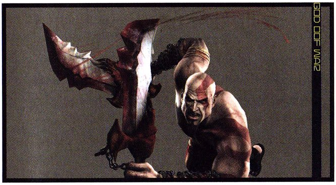
The settings all result in a sharper image, but there's not much in the way of a peripheral-view advantage. And every time you switch from a race to a menu or loading screen, the game does an annoying resolution switch that leads to a lot of blinking and flashing on your TV.

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

(Sony CEA)

Yet another game that doesn't mention progressive-scan support on the box, the gorgeous *Shadow of the Colossus* supports both 480p output and a 16:9 aspect ratio, each accessed from the in-game menu and available at any time.

The 16:9 aspect ratio doesn't seem to result in any sort of noticeable screen cropping, and the 480p output does look a tad sharper than normal, but not by a lot. It's kind of strange, considering the textures in *Shadow* are so intricate. Still, the game looks awesome no matter what, and the graphics whores among us are sure to notice the extra four pixels in each strand of colossi ass hair.



GRAN TURISMO 4

BURNOUT REVENGE

SOCOM 3: U.S. NAVY SEALS

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

SOME GAMES LET YOU ADJUST THE SETTINGS ON THE IN-GAME MENU, SOME REQUIRE STRANGE BOOT-UP BUTTON SEQUENCES AND ANIMAL SACRIFICES TO RUN AT 480P.

SOUL CALIBUR III

(Namco)

Here's where things get weird. To access the progressive-scan mode in *Soul Calibur*, you must hold the X and Triangle buttons on the controller while turning on the PS2. Keep holding them until the game boots up and offers you the option to play in 480p. There is no way to set the resolution otherwise. You can change the aspect ratio to 16:9 through the options menu, however.

Soul Calibur III is a darn fine-lookin' game, and progressive scan just makes it look that much nicer. Again, not a huge leap in graphical quality, but a noticeable one. The downside is that the widescreen support actually zooms and crops the screen, meaning you're losing a bit of the image at the top and bottom of the display. This is pretty common on the PS2.

BURNOUT REVENGE

(Electronic Arts)

Burnout Revenge is yet another game that requires you to use the boot-up code to access progressive scan (hold X and Triangle on the controller while turning on the system).

Because the game moves so quickly, it's hard to notice that big a difference in the graphics while you play, but again, real graphics sticklers will surely see the upgrade.

A bit more weirdness to add to *Burnout Revenge*—the only way to switch to a 16:9 screen ratio is to set it right on your PlayStation 2. Boot up the system without a game in it and head over to your system options. Find the aspect ratio setting there and change it to 16:9; otherwise, you'll find that the world of *Burnout Revenge* is decidedly fatter than it should be.

JAK 3

(Sony CEA)

The final game in our HDTV playtest is *Jak 3*, and like most other PS2 titles, it doesn't really feature any stunning differences when played in progressive scan. The *Jak* series has always featured cartoony visuals that already look great on a regular television, so while you'll notice a sharper image in 480p, it's nothing to get too excited over.

Unfortunately, *Jak 3* is another game in which the widescreen setting zooms the image and crops the top and bottom of the screen rather than extending the viewing area horizontally. Lame.

Both settings can be found in the options menu and changed at any time during the game.

For information on other PlayStation 2 titles, a great online resource is www.hdtvarcade.com/ps2list.htm. There you'll find a giant list of PS2 games and whether they support a 16:9 aspect ratio; 480p, 720p, or 1080i resolution; Dolby sound; and online play. | Greg Sewart

FORGOTTEN GEM

JUMPING FLASH!

CREATIVE AND ADDICTIVE, SONY'S 3D PLATFORMER BOUNDED INTO PLAYSTATION HISTORY

PlayStation
Jumping Flash!
PlayStation
Jumping Flash! 2

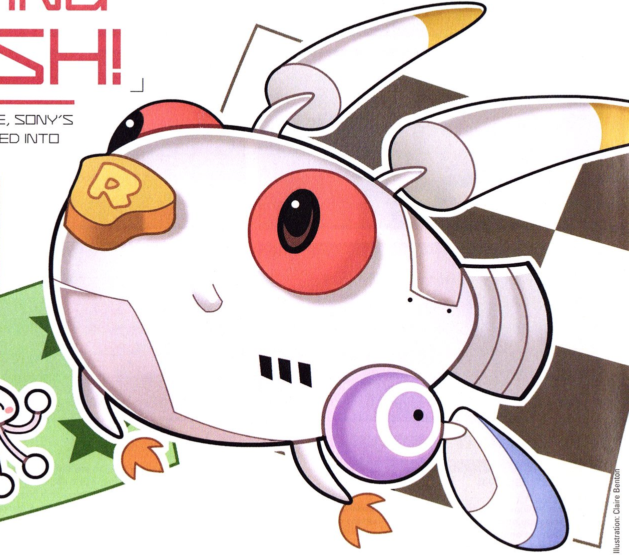


Illustration: Claire Benton

A year before Nintendo "invented" the 3D platformer with *Super Mario 64*, a Japanese developer called Exact neatly beat Mario to the punch with an addictive little game called *Jumping Flash!*

Published by Sony a few months after the PlayStation launch, *JF!* was the spiritual sequel to a game for the Japanese X68000 PC by the name of *Geograph Seal*. The earlier game was merely a primitive sketch of an idea compared to its PS1 successor, which was both highly polished and visually stunning. (Admittedly, it's not so impressive-looking now, but keep in mind that flat-shaded polygons had much more cachet in 1995.)

JF! feels as much like a first-person shooter as it does a platformer. The entire game is viewed from within the cockpit of the player's Robbit, a cross between a mech suit and a bunny. And like a bunny, Robbit gets around by leaping. Not normal jumps, mind you, nor even double jumps, but incredible triple leaps that carry the player hundreds of meters into the air.

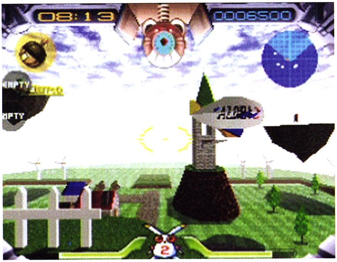
As a result, the standard play mechanics of the FPS genre are turned on their large, floppy ear; *JF!* has less to do with circle-strafing and more to do with getting to the high ground—*really* high. Robbit's world features plenty of floating rocks and elevated areas to navigate, and getting out of a tough spot is as simple as hitting the jump button a few times and landing half the level away...except in the few claustrophobic interior levels, of course.

> JF! FEELS AS MUCH LIKE AN FPS AS A PLATFORMER.

While anyone who's ever played a jump-intensive FPS like *Turok* is likely to run screaming at the thought of a shooter built entirely around hang time, *JF!* handily avoids the frustrations common to the genre with a single simple innovation. As players begin their descent from way up in the sky, the camera automatically tilts slightly downward to reveal Robbit's shadow. Lining up your shadow with the chunk of real estate you hope to land on is a simple task, provided you possess the slightest hint of hand-eye coordination.

11:52
0003600
Look
Shot
Special
Jump

08:54
0003700
EMPTY
EMPTY
EMPTY
Exit
Look
Shot
Special
Jump



EMPTY
EMPTY
EMPTY

LIKE A BUNNY, ROBBIT GETS AROUND BY LEAPING, NOT NORMAL JUMPS, MIND YOU, NOR EVEN DOUBLE JUMPS, BUT INCREDIBLE TRIPLE LEAPS THAT CARRY THE PLAYER HUNDREDS OF METERS INTO THE AIR.

Brilliant as it is, *JF!* has been largely forgotten by time. Gamers were quick to forget its charms once *Super Mario 64* arrived and developers the world over decided that the third-person perspective should become the standard for 3D platformers. Exact's masterpiece was finally given its due in 2002, when Retro Studios gave bounty huntress Samus Aran a Robbit-like double jump in *Metroid Prime.* Suddenly, everyone remembered that they'd seen a remarkably similar setup years before....

After releasing *Jumping Flash! 2* in 1996, the *JF!* team went on to create the PS1 version of *Ghost in the Shell* (a game so good that it became the cover story for *OPM*'s first issue) before producing a lackluster third installment, *Robbit Mon Dieu!* This was followed by *Pocket MuuMuu*, a collection of minigames for the PocketStation; neither made it to the United States, although it was no real loss as neither lived up to the high standard set by the originals. Ignore the weak follow-ups; both *Jumping Flash!* and its first sequel are still good fun. Dated fun, sure. But still good. | *Jeremy Parish*

PS1-DERLAND

IS THAT A STATION IN YOUR POCKET, OR...?

By Jeremy Parish

When he's not trying to reclaim his vanished youth with obsolete games, Jeremy works as 1UP.com's features editor and charming mascot. Check out his blog at toastyfrog.1UP.com.

The success of the PlayStation family sometimes makes it easy to overlook the blemishes on Sony's track record. Take the company's first portable system, for instance. No, no, not the PlayStation Portable—the PocketStation.

Resembling a memory card that had a baby with a Tamagotchi, with a 32-by-32-pixel black-and-white LCD screen and an insatiable hunger for expensive, nonrechargeable batteries, the PocketStation was everything the PSP isn't. It had much more in common with Sega's Dreamcast VMU. In fact, the debate over who came up with the idea for the system first continues to rage among some of the Internet's more tenacious fanboys.

The PocketStation never quite made it to the United States. As anyone who's ever messed around with a VMU can probably guess, it wasn't exactly host to compelling gaming experiences. That didn't stop Sony from creating PlayStation software that existed for the sole purpose of providing PocketStation downloads, though, most notably *Jumping Flash!* spin-off *Pocket MuuMuu* and *Doko Demo Issyo*, which featured the debut of Sony's Japanese mascot, Toro.

Real PlayStation games supported the PocketStation, too. *Final Fantasy VIII* was the highest-profile hit with its Odaka ke Chocobo minigame—also notable as the only PocketStation game officially supported in the United States. Odaka ke Chocobo was an ultraprimitive dungeon crawler that didn't come within spitting distance of fun, but any goodies you acquired while playing could be transferred back to the PlayStation game. As it turns out, several abilities in *FFVIII* could be acquired only through Odaka ke Chocobo, so you anal-retentive completist types may want to start prowling eBay for cast-off PocketStations.

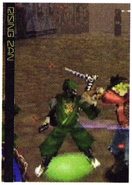
THE POCKETSTATION WAS EVERYTHING THE PSP ISN'T.

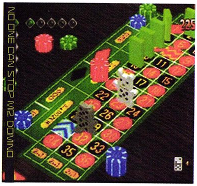
The U.S. releases of *Street Fighter Alpha 3* and *Ridge Racer Type 4* supported PocketStation as well, though unofficially. Hardcore fans might want to take the titles' respective minigames for a spin—or not, since they were about as entertaining as your mom's Tupperware parties. Konami, on the other hand, made the PocketStation-only elements of *Metal Gear Solid VR Missions* accessible within the main game for U.S. players.

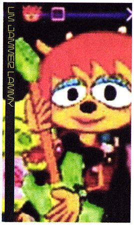
Oddly enough, the best use of the PocketStation came in a set of repackaged NES games, the *Rockman Complete Works* series. *Works* compiled the first six *Mega Man* games with no graphical upgrades and only a smattering of new features for $30 apiece, which explains why they never came to America. The one significant addition Capcom did make to *Works* was the surprisingly robust PocketStation minigame Pokerock.

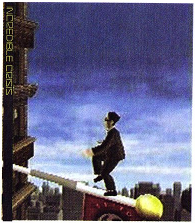
Playing Pokerock let players go rock-paper-scissors against classic *Mega Man* bosses, who could be controlled as well. The coolest feature was the mix-and-match between games. Ever wonder what would happen if *MM3*'s Magnet Man fought *MM2*'s Metal Man? Pokerock is the only way to know. It even allowed for head-to-head battling with other players via infrared, which would go on to be a key component of the *Battle Network* games. On top of that, performing well in the minigames unlocked certain bonus features in the PlayStation games.

It's easy to see what Sony was thinking with the PocketStation—it's a memory card *and* a game system! Build up your save files while sitting on the bus! But there's only so much fun you can have with 1980-level game technology. Still, it certainly makes you appreciate your PSP all the more. |









PLAYSTATION'S GREATEST MISSES

11 UNDERAPPRECIATED CLASSICS

THE LIFE OF A VIDEOGAME CAN BE CRUEL. BORN TO BLOCKBUSTER EXPECTATIONS AND SURROUNDED BY CUTTHROAT COMPETITION, GAMES HAVE A SINGLE HOLIDAY SEASON TO MAKE THEIR CASE FOR EXISTENCE. THE STRONG BIG-SELLERS SURVIVE ON THE SHELVES FOR MONTHS, SOMETIMES YEARS, WHILE THE WEAK ARE QUICKLY DUMPED INTO BARGAIN BINS, SOLD AND RESOLD ON EBAY AT A PRICE ROUGHLY EQUAL TO THE COST OF SHIPPING. SOMETIMES, GREAT GAMES SLIP THROUGH THE CRACKS, DOOMED TO TRAVEL THE USED-GAME CIRCUIT UNTIL ABUSE RENDERS THEIR DISCS UNREADABLE. THESE ARE PLAYSTATION'S GREATEST MISSES.

PS1

NO ONE CAN STOP MR. DOMINO

1998

A puzzler owing less to *Tetris* than the rainy-day pastime of domino toppling, *No One Can Stop Mr. Domino* is an interesting oddity. Racing around *Katamari Damacy*–esque stages (convenience store shelves, a living room, etc.), you lay down lines of dominos then topple them, terrorizing and abusing the level's inhabitants to comedic effect.

RISING ZAN

1999

Part spaghetti Western, part samurai slasher, *Rising Zan* is a lovable mess of a game. Zan, the main character, is equally comfortable with a sword or a revolver and uses both to stylishly gut sumo wrestlers, scarecrows, and a horde of random bad-guy meat. With an "All Your Base Are Belong to Us" level of translation that drops catchphrases like "Super Ultra Sexy Hero," *Zan* is a treasure trove of quirk.

UM JAMMER LAMMY

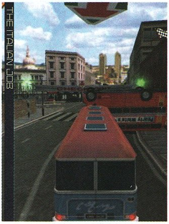
1999

Sure, everyone played *Parappa the Rapper* (the rhythm-genre-pioneering rap game), but did you play its guitar-shredding, pregnant-teen-hallucinating little sister? *Um Jammer Lammy* uses the same Simon Says gameplay and paper-thin art style of *Parappa* but piles on the surreal happenings. Our heroine bashes out riffs on vacuum cleaners and fire hoses, rocking her way to hell and back and blowing the fragile minds of unsuspecting gamers along the way.

INCREDIBLE CRISIS

2000

A typical Japanese family sets out to celebrate their grandmother's birthday but runs up against a patch of ridiculous bad luck, disasters, humiliations, and bizarre situations. *Incredible Crisis* plays out this scenario with a series of simple minigames. You might, for example, help the father of the family bring a female coworker to orgasm by feeling around in the dark for her back-massage sweet spot. There are few games that can match the sheer weirdness of *Incredible Crisis*.



GITAROO MAN
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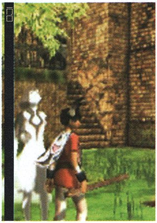
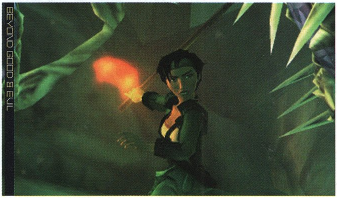
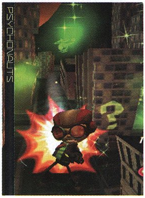
ZONE OF THE ENDERS





DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS



THE ITALIAN JOB

2002

Before the 2003 Marky Mark Hollywood remake soured its name, *The Italian Job* made a last-minute grab at the PS1 car-chase crown. Based on the swinging '60s-era cult film, the game is all about launching tiny European cars off of historical landmarks. It's a speedier, less-finicky version of the formula *Driver* made popular, and it's still worth the bargain-bin price.

PS2

ZONE OF THE ENDERS

2001

If you bought this game when it came out, it was probably for the playable demo of *Metal Gear Solid 2* included in the package. But the superfast, supershort giant-robot-destroying romp by *Metal Gear* director Hideo Kojima, though not up to the high standards of his best games, stands on its own. While most games in the genre project the hugeness of their robots with slow, lumbering movements, *ZOE*'s bots move like ninjas. A bargain-bin find.

ICO

2001

With a huge amount of praise and countless column inches dedicated to *Ico* over the years, you might expect that the game was a hit. But this moody adventure never received the attention it deserved from gamers. Reaching back to the pre-cinematic days of adventure gaming, *Ico* explains very little in the way of its story but stands as one of the most emotionally engaging games ever made.

GITAROO MAN

2002

Like a rhythm-game adaptation of David Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust*, *Gitaroo Man* follows the story of an intergalactic guitar virtuoso. Charming sketchbook-style art fills the screen with what appears to be a kindergartner's psychedelic mushroom trip while the game's tunes slowly worm their way into your brain. The original playing style (in which you must follow curving lines with the analog stick while nailing the beats with buttons) reinvents *Parappa*'s wheel. *Gitaroo Man* is the very definition of a cult hit.

SOMETIMES, GREAT GAMES SLIP THROUGH THE CRACKS, DOOMED TO TRAVEL THE USED-GAME CIRCUIT UNTIL ABUSE RENDERS THEIR DISCS UNREADABLE.

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

2003

Released to disappointing sales, *Beyond Good & Evil*'s reputation as a hidden classic grows by the year. The robust narrative surrounding photojournalist/leading lady Jade is one of the most overt political statements ever put to polygons, while the game itself takes daring liberties with the *Zelda* template. *Beyond Good & Evil* is a vivid dystopia crawling with intrigue, memorable characters, and carefully crafted "hell yeah" moments. It's a game ahead of its time.

DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS

2003

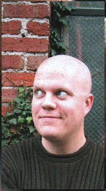
American RPG fans usually go for the flash and panache of big-budget, cinematic epics like *Final Fantasy*, but there's a contingent of serious aficionados out there who are famished for complexity, relishing new battle systems and deep customization. *Disgaea* is a game for them. Poured from the mold of turn-based strategy games like *Ogre Battle* and *Final Fantasy Tactics*, *Disgaea* is a serious stat fetishist's feast, and its Japanese quirk factor has endeared it to a small but rabid following.

PSYCHONAUTS

2005

It may be a bit early to call *Psychonauts* a miss, but it seems certain that the game will never garner the audience it deserves. With some of the most genuinely funny writing, imaginative storytelling, and lovable characters ever brought to an interactive world, *Psychonauts* is a name you'll be hearing for years. Sure, Raz, the game's psychic savant hero, unashamedly cops his moves from *Zelda* and *Mario* games, but the levels are what really make an impression. Each representing the twisted psyche of a different character, the levels themselves tell the game's story. Who could forget the milkman's paranoid vision of a suburbia overwhelmed by hidden cameras and secret government agents? | *Robert Ashley*

JOE RYBICKI must confess to his eternal shame that he did not own a PS1 before starting his job at *P.S.X.* In his defense, though, the system was not yet a year old, and he was a dirt-poor college student.



IN MY DAY...

THE UNCANNY VALLEY

It was the spring of 1996. Preparing to graduate from college and move from Cleveland to Chicago, I started hunting for a job in the classifieds of the *Tribune*, so I'd be able to, you know, *eat* once I got there. When I saw the listing for "writer/game player," I knew my life would never be the same.

As part of the interview process for my first job at *P.S.X.* (the precursor to this very magazine), I was instructed to write three reviews of games for the recently released PS1. So I headed down to Blockbuster and picked up *Resident Evil*, *Battle Arena Toshinden*, and *Bottom of the 9th*—the first polygonal baseball game. While I tore through all three titles in my parents' basement, my dad, God rest his soul, would come down and make the indescribably bad jokes that were his trademark. At one point he came down, saw me playing *Bottom of the 9th* and said, "I didn't know the Indians were playing today."

"Har har, Dad."

"What? Is this on tape?"

I realized then that he wasn't joking. He was watching me play a videogame that he honestly thought was live baseball. (I should note that it was his hearing that was bad; his eyesight was as sharp as ever.) We gamers may chuckle indulgently at how supremely out of the loop our parents are, but it's worth remembering that to nongamers, games can be indistinguishable from television—at first glance, anyway.

But of course, for those of us with experience with games, there's no such confusion. Even the best-looking games are very recognizably *games*. Last month I talked about having to struggle to see what was so special about *Project Gotham Racing 3*. The thing that got me was that as good as the game looked, a gamer would never mistake it for a live racing broadcast on TV.

Maybe someday we'll get to the point where gamers really will have to do a Bob Rybicki–style double take when seeing the newest game—an "is it live or is it Memorex?" moment for our industry. But the uncanny valley says it's unlikely.

Put forth by Japanese robotics expert Masahiro Mori, the theory of the uncanny valley says, broadly speaking, that the closer a simulation gets to the reality it's synthesizing, the more the observer notices the differences between fiction and reality. (Watch *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* for a really great example of this; no matter how lifelike the characters look, you can't help but notice how unnaturally they move and speak.) And you don't get out of the valley until you're in the area of 90 percent similarity to reality.

Maybe that's why we gamers have become so critical with the current generation: The games are starting to look lifelike enough that our eyes can't help but be drawn to the areas in which they fail. There's probably a lesson about life in there somewhere. But I suppose that's a topic for another column.

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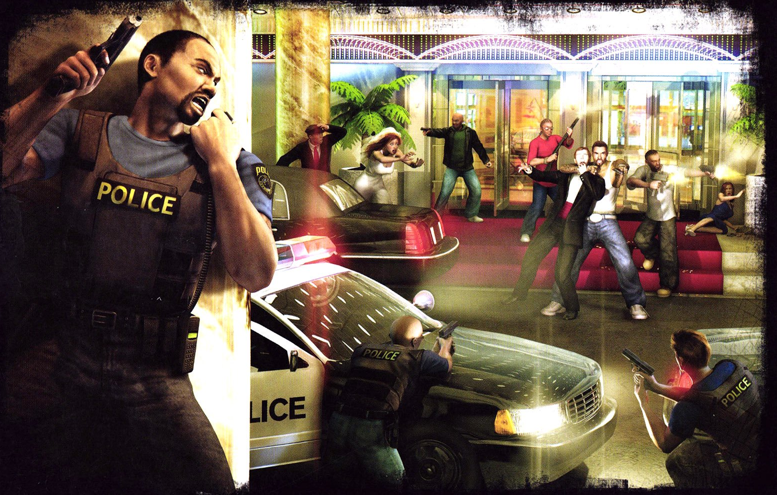

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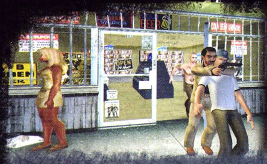

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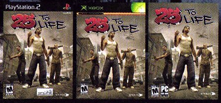

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